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# Inheritance of 'Dreams

by

JOHN DRUMMOND

author of *Charta for the Soil*

John Drummond is one of the few new writers who have built up an established position since the war. He has written two successful novels. His recent *Charta for the Soil* set forth a plan for the future of agriculture worked out to the smallest detail and aroused keen interest in farming and planning circles.

Mr. Drummond is the head of a remarkable family who have owned and farmed land in Scotland for seven hundred years. They have been for generations adventurers and pioneers, and the author's sister was, in our time, the first woman marine engineer. In this new book, *Inheritance of Dreams*, he tells the story of this family, and gives a vivid picture of his own struggles as a farmer and landlord. The narrative he unfolds is a very human one, and he has written a delightful autobiography with a country and agricultural background.

*Illustrated*



# Inheritance of Dreams



*by the same author*



CHARTER FOR THE SOIL





AERIAL VIEW OF MEGGINCH LST ATL

# INHERITANCE OF DREAMS

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*being the story of an average man, his efforts to  
adapt his surroundings to a changed world, to develop  
a moderate brain into an efficient one, and to reason  
out a self-satisfying understanding  
of the unknown*

by  
JOHN DRUMMOND

FABER AND FABER LIMITED  
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London

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO  
HUGO

*who entered the Megginch family and absorbed the legends and  
asked innumerable questions, and learnt to ride, to carpenter, to  
swim, to argue, and made boats, and shot, and fished, and  
climbed, and hunted for secret passages, and loved books, and  
music, and Spring, earth, the fresh air, and the smell of wood-  
smoke, and learnt to be a gentle man, not to hate, and to prize  
honour*

*who went to schools, and came home for holidays, pockets filled  
with treasures, and got 98 per cent in his entrance exam.; and  
joined up from Cambridge, and from the ranks got pips on his  
shoulders, and fought, and got wounded, and mended,  
and wounded again, and died, and is buried  
in a foreign land where our hearts  
are also*

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## *Part One*

### Castle in the Air

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#### *Back to the Ark*

**T**his book is to be different—just straight me and you! In the hope that my failures (and occasional successes) may be of some interest, amusement, and possibly even value, I will tell you everything—concealing nothing. I therefore want you to come into my home and go round everywhere with me, to see what goes on, for to get right into the life of someone else must be entertaining and diverting—otherwise the novel would not have been created and films would be confined to news and educational topics.

This is the story of a peculiar man—member of a peculiar family. It seems to me it should be told because I doubt there being another story like it. The method of telling is a problem, however, for it is a tale of diversions having no beginning and no ending and so is difficult to make comprehensible or lucid.

I will begin at the time when Malcolm, son of Andrew, King of Hungary, came over with Queen Margaret in ten hundred and something, and obtained a grant of land from Rex Robert II, for this shows one that even in those days the Drummonds were adventurers and opportunists—characteristics that have been handed on through the generations.

My own particular branch of the family started with Malcolm's son, Maurice, who, after trying his hand at the Crusades, became knight and hereditary steward by the more or less straightforward procedure of marrying the heiress to a hereditary knighthood and stewardship.

By this time the family had taken the surname of Drummond—to be more exact, they took the name of Drumin from their original grant of land and this soon became standardized as Drummond.

In the fifteen hundreds the hereditary stewardship business seems to

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

have become rather thin. My family had also become slightly unpopular, owing to a feud with the Murrays, in which we burnt the best part of their clan whilst at church; so they cashed the stewardship in, and John Drummond and his wife (Jean) moved down from the Highlands and bought Megginch, a fairly new castle surrounded by very fertile land. This they and following generations developed, at first on feudal lines and later on the landlord-tenant system.

My family—myself included—never seem to do anything in the easy way; a friend once said of me:

‘If John wanted to make a boat he would start off by planting acorns, and buy a desert to grow them in, just to make things more difficult.’ Nor have my family ever seemed able to do anything in the normal, fashionable manner.

My great-grandfather—a staunch Conservative—suddenly became a supporter of the Reform Bill, a step which made him very unpopular with the other landlords of the district; it will be remembered that the Reform Bill fairly wrecked Agriculture; but that was the way he saw it and, of course, there was a lot in his view that the conditions in the slum towns were terrible. It would certainly have been more logical to agitate for the manufacturers to improve, with higher wages, the dreadful conditions they had created—but he did not see it that way and went, full out, for a measure which was going to ruin his son and give the greatest set-back our agriculture has ever had, for it paved the way for the transfer of the landlord’s powers to a mass of unscrupulous speculators.

In conformity with the usual family spirit of being different, John, M.P., sent his children by boat from Dundee to be educated in Holland—at Leyden. They absorbed some Dutch ideas and translated these to Scotland. (See illustration of the ‘Becch Walk’ for an example.)

We are also adventurers, a spirit developed from financial reasons. As the family has usually been hard up for cash successive generations have had to go out and hunt for something, and by now the pioneer spirit has got so bred in that we are on the warpath practically from our cradles. For instance, another John was the first M.P. for Perthshire; he got in by fifteen votes against the Haldane of those days (there were thirty-five in an electorate)!

Gordon fought at Lundy’s Lane with a bullet through his neck and afterwards became Governor of Canada.

## DESERT VICTORY

Robert put most of the family money into a ship and was one of the very early traders with China. In the Napoleonic wars the ship was turned into a privateer and captured one loaded with stone cannon-balls, another cargoed with china (most of which got smashed in the taking). Robert then took on a French man-of-war—and that was that!

The last John (myself) starts a new system of farming.

Our menfolk are, to say the least of it—rash! The women also.

Jean got fined for attending a Conventicle; she reacted by attending another, with a resulting fine of £500 Scots—a fortune in those days.

Victoria was the first woman marine engineer.

We are warlike also. The Admiral (another Adam) put spikes on his new wall 'for Frenchmen's heads' he said; my father thought they would do for Germans! Maybe the old fire is dying, for I am sure the proper place for a head is really on a neck!

I could go on indefinitely but this is not a family history, although (as some individual members crop up through the book) it is necessary to give you an idea of what they are like—they go all out for what they believe in, while there have always been adventurers and pioneers—from Maurice, 1256—a Crusader—to John, 1944—a new-plan farmer.

## *Desert Victory*

I said I wished to take you into my home and show you everything, but first I must 'give you a piece of my mind' so that you can understand certain convictions I have and a philosophy, rather apart from contemporary fashionable thought, which guides my actions. Without these clues, you would not be able to understand the life and death value I place on certain subjects which to you—perhaps—appear of relatively small importance.

Agricultural land is controlled entirely by the rainfall.

That may seem rather a sweeping statement but it is, nevertheless, true. In a country of heavy rainfall one can, within reason, play any trick one likes with the soil and get away with it; on the other hand, in a dry country a farmer has to work carefully or his land will revert to desert.

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

It is the fashion, amongst modern writers on agriculture, to take certain obvious, or suspected, faults in our present methods of farming and state that their own particular system will cure these faults.

For instance, it is realized on all sides that, in some manner, our food is wrong and causing deficiency troubles, both in our stock and in ourselves; again, it is painfully obvious that large tracts of the world's surface are reverting from fertile country to desert; furthermore, our crop and stock diseases are increasing at an uncomfortable rate. These are the things every farmer knows and feels vaguely uneasy about. They are also realized by our scientists and so anybody with a theory labels it as an immediate cure for these. A man like myself, believing in the use of humus, will say: 'Cut out artificials and your troubles will go.' On the other hand, a person acknowledging that in nature the soil is never ploughed, says: 'Take away the plough and everything will come right.'

The truth of the matter is these beliefs about artificials, poisonous sprays, or ploughing, may be perfectly right but they are merely accessories after the fact.

The first essential for long-term farming is to adapt your methods to your rainfall.

The dust-bowls of Northern America have, without doubt, been hastened into dust-bowls by improper agricultural methods but they would revert to dust-bowls naturally, even if the soil had never been touched with a spade. A treeless plain means one thing only to the farmer—a land without enough rainfall to grow trees, gradually working itself back to desert.

Let us face the truth. Whatever we do about it, the ultimate end of this planet is desert. In so many million years there will be nothing but a barren ball, dwindling slowly away into space. Once one has realized this fact our agricultural purpose becomes clearer, for we can recognize that the inevitable law of our earth is to dry up slowly. The interesting part of this fact is that the desert law is not a remote geological possibility but something actually going on. One is amazed that large and progressive civilizations could ever have flourished in what are now sandy wastes, and alarmed at the man-hastened deserts of our own generation. One says piously, 'Thank God the ancient Britons did not have tractors and artificials', but I think a great many people miss the really significant fact that the desert law is just as much an inevitable

## DESERT VICTORY

and unchangeable natural law as our own birth and ultimate death. We cannot stop it—it is too big for us—but we can plan our methods of farming by the rainfall of our district and by so doing avert the ultimate desert for ourselves and many future generations.

If the general public could only be made to understand these facts, I quite seriously believe that those who wish to see humanity continue as a going concern would take more interest in agriculture; if they could be made to see that they are living on a planet slowly reverting to a dusty waste, it would make a tremendous difference to their outlook on farmers for they would be able to understand that farmers are divided into two main classes—those determined to take all they can out of the soil while the soil—so to speak—is still there, and those who realize that the soil is a trust and that its cultivation must be planned very carefully, in relation to the rainfall, in order that it may be fruitful for the next generation.

We now think it improper that the industrialists of the last century should, through greed, have been permitted to create black countries and slum areas; it is possible that another generation will look back with considerable disfavour on the farmers who created deserts or belts of poisonous soil or who failed to farm to the rainfall. Yet, to farm for the future, to try and plan years ahead a structure which will ward off the ultimate desert means to-day the running of a business dead against the artificial financial laws we have created—that is to say, to farm idealistically is to head for bankruptcy.

At one end of the scale one can grow wheat on a tract of country as a one-course crop; if too many people do not do the same thing, and set up epidemics, one can continue after the soil is exhausted, by the use of artificial fertilizers, to grow just wheat for a long time; one can harvest, thresh, and burn the straw; one need have no expensive building or even worry to make roads. Provided the price of wheat is reasonable and there is a market for it, this system will bring in satisfactory returns with the minimum of capital expenditure.

At the other end of the scale one can divide the holding into numerous small fields and intensively rotate stock and crops, using every available waste product to make humus and apply it to the land. To do this successfully one must have many expensive buildings, make serviceable roads, employ a large quantity of skilled labour, and have a very big capital investment in stock and machinery. To create such a system

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

will take years and to maintain it—once created—will require, at the normal rates for farm produce, the acceptance of a very small interest on a very large capital outlay. There will, under present conditions, be periods when the prices for produce will fall to a level at which this highly complicated form of farming becomes unprofitable and, with the very large expenditure, involve losing staggering amounts of money. Under the conditions and Government tendencies of the past, this large loss will never be recovered in the boom years and so, to continue on such a system (under the sort of conditions which we are accustomed to) means that this type of farmer will have to be continually making good his losses by getting capital in from outside sources and his income will always remain very low.

In a magnificently run country like Denmark—where the soil received first consideration and was farmed on the method I have described, every farmer<sup>8</sup> was working on mortgages—debts which would never really be paid off. For the privilege of running his farm magnificently, for the honour of owning his own ground, for the endless work he put in, his position—financially—amounted roughly to this—he received a wage of about two pounds a week and ‘owned’ a debt which it would practically be impossible for him ever to pay. .

Idealistic farming will continue to be unprofitable even though the world at large realizes that the first type of farmer is going to leave a desert behind in a few hundred years, while the second type of farmer may keep the world properly fed and stave off the desert for several thousand years.

It will remain a thankless job as long as the peoples of the world think on the same lines as animals—just to the next meal ahead. .

## *Eating the Cake*

I do not claim any patent rights for the views expressed in ‘Desert Victory’, for they are held, rather abstractedly, by a great number of farmers and politicians when it suits their immediate ends. The philosophy arising from this thesis that there is a definite reason for passing things on to the next generation is not only

## EATING THE CAKE

decidedly controversial but contrary to the fashionable practice of to-day; I feel somewhat diffident in including it in a book which aims at being lighthearted.

My desire to pass things on to the next generation is not at the moment fashionable for there are two interpretations of my desert story.

One is that we live on a dying world, an oblate spheroid which will undoubtedly in time fade away to nothingness or into unknown forms of radiation. The group who take this view hold the primary belief that our presence in this world is accidental—the combination of a million factors which may never have occurred before and of which there is, possibly, no other example in the whole universe; that is to say, we are here, perhaps, because a certain remote tribe of apes changed over from a vegetarian diet to a carnivorous one—to eating flesh—and thus had to develop their brains in order to catch their food; from this start we have gradually developed into the neurotic tribes peopling the earth to-day. On this assumption one can understand that there is no particular purpose in our presence on the earth—we can have no logically higher motive for existence than to keep ourselves dry, fed, and amused. If we find it convenient to group ourselves in tribes, it is only for geographical reasons, or to provide us with the increased luxuries which only the massed efforts of a gang can give. Again, if we combine to kill off our competitors it is only so that we may obtain more food, better houses, and more amusements for ourselves.

Following these lines of thought one might say that our presence on this earth is really a huge joke, for being here accidentally it does not matter to anybody or anything whether we go on being here or not. Actually a great number of other living things who have the misfortune to share the world with us would get on much better without us, for we are the sharks that prey on every living thing, the locusts that devour and despoil the face of the earth.

I have said that this is the view taken by a large group of the world's inhabitants to-day but it would have been more accurate to say that one could logically trace back the actions of the majority to this thesis; one could, for example, argue that if a man cashes in his soil, making it irreclaimable, he has done so because he does not worry about the fact that he is putting the earth back to desert a few hundred years

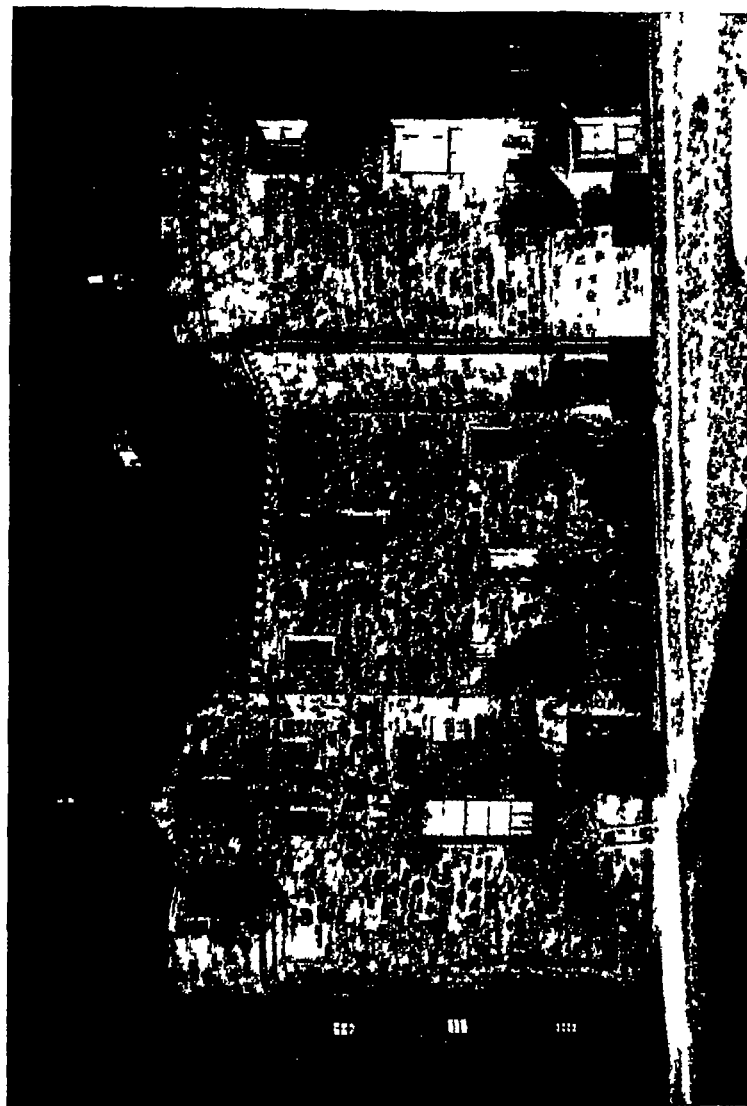


## CASTLE IN THE AIR

before its time; in fact, one might say he does not feel any obligation to preserve anything for unborn generations; he implies, by his actions, that he thinks our presence here is aimless and that it does not matter much if we go on existing until the world becomes impossible to hold life or if we use up our resources quickly and make it rapidly unfit for habitation. If you consider all our modern tendencies from this angle, I think you will find that the 'No pocket in a shroud' belief is the most prevalent.

Now, I belong to the opposite group and hold an entirely different outlook; I believe that our being here is not in the nature of a joke at all, but has a purpose. I believe that the reason for our presence on earth can only become apparent to us when our brains have been developed a great deal more than they are at present; our mental powers are still in their infancy and it will take several hundred generations to develop them sufficiently to understand the reason and purpose of our existence. This view makes life much more satisfying to me, for it gives one something definite to do, some purpose. The people belonging to this group of thought aim at leaving the world better off than they found it, at educating their children a little further than they were educated themselves, and at handing on their worldly possessions in a more efficient or prosperous state than that in which they were taken over.

I have reasons for believing that life is purposful. I believe that we live in a world analogous to the sort of world a trout in a tank lives in. We know all about the inside of the tank but it is impossible for us to understand what the vastness outside the tank is like; it is also impossible for anybody outside the tank to explain to the trout inside the tank what the outside is like, for we have no common language, and even if those outside the tank could talk 'fish' they could not explain to the trout, for example, how an internal combustion engine works, for the fish does not understand anything we understand. Yet the trout knows vaguely there is something outside his tank for the keeper drops worms in; he knows also that the something has purpose, for the worms are dropped in at set times. In the same way I know there is something outside our tank and that the something has purpose, for occasionally worms are dropped in. These worms are discoveries and thoughts which are new knowledge and which could not have been constructed by adding together the factors in existence at the time of their appear-



MEGGINGH FI OODLIT



THE BEECH WALK

## EATING THE CAKE

ance. They come in the form of inspiration which it appears to me is broadcast in flashes over the world, in such a way that several people can pick it up at the same time.

If you study the history of invention and discovery with this idea in your mind you will be surprised how often a new thought or an invention is made by several people at the same time.

I know that the argument against these views is that we cannot prove that there is anything outside the tank. But if you hold this view and wish to go through the tank and see what the outside is like, there are several ways in which you can peer over the edge. The simplest is to record your dreams; you may say that you never dream; if you remember your thoughts at the moment of waking, you will find that you dream quite often. By recording your dreams you will find yourself in an amazingly distorted world translated by your brain into the picture language your brain can understand; you will find also that your dreams are sometimes traceable to things that have happened in the past and sometimes to things which are going to happen in the future. Yes! in the future! (If you are interested in the subject, *An Experiment with Time*<sup>1</sup> will give you some interesting details.) You can speculate as much as you like why it is possible to see trivial events which have not yet taken place. You can make up theories about time, but you cannot arrive at anything universally comprehensible, because we have not, as yet, enough pieces of the puzzle even to begin to explain these things; our brains are at the moment only capable of thinking in pictures. Our trying to comprehend what goes on outside the tank is like the efforts of a cave-man trying to make an aeroplane with flint axe-heads and half-baked pottery, the only processes of manufacture he understands. If, however, we take the trouble to preserve our race long enough the necessary information will filter through in the same way that the necessary knowledge how to build an aeroplane filtered to the savage's descendants; it is, in fact, filtering through now.

The members of one group believe that (because we see bits of the future in dreams and because of many other factors, which seem ordained) our lives are scheduled from the swaddling bands to the shroud, and so it does not matter how much we try we are bound to do the things we are destined to do from the start. Just touch your nose

<sup>1</sup> *An Experiment with Time*, by J. W. Dunne. Faber & Faber Ltd.

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

with your hand. You managed to do that. Now, consider how crazy a Divine Planner would be if He ordained you to touch your nose with your hand for no other reason than that you read it in a book—in the same way you could put a revolver to your head and pull the trigger. No, we have any amount of freewill; every single inhabitant of the earth could commit suicide to-morrow without interference; but through some long-ago leak into the tank you and I know that suicide is not the right thing to do and the reason why this moral principle filtered into our tank was to encourage us to struggle on, to make it possible for generations yet unborn to imbibe the worms the keeper drops in.

I, therefore, believe that any form of needless waste or destruction of our resources is wrong and any form of preservation or improvement for the next generation is right.

I would, of course, think that way—have I not told you that I come of a family who have struggled to improve themselves and keep going for generations? But I wanted you to know my deeper reasons for this thought because the class of people who have lived all these years by what is called 'privilege' are not fashionable, the modern tendency is in favour of a scratch line start for all entries, enforced by adjusting taxation so that we go shirt-sleeves to shirt-sleeves in one generation; that is to say, and are discouraged from building up anything better for our children. You must not think, however, that I resent being called Blimpish or privileged—I don't—it is the underlying principle which I think wrong, for I believe any advantage we can pass on to our children which makes them more knowledgeable than we were, or any privilege we can hand on to another generation which makes the land better looked after, is right.

I am glad, therefore, my ancestors fought so hard to win, hold, and improve the soil, for I believe they were doing the right thing. I want to do likewise and to leave a little more privilege behind me for someone else sharing my views to continue.

As I have told you, I believe it is our duty to build up for the peoples of the earth a standard of freedom from want so that their knowledge can improve on spiritual lines until they reach a degree of wisdom when they will understand the purpose and meaning of God.

## HE TELLS OF HIMSELF

### *He tells of Himself*

It is said that everyone in the world has a human story if they cared to tell it; but few people have the nerve to sit down and write their story. If they do, they are careful to suppress the interesting bits—the things they have said, for which they could have bitten their tongues off afterwards, the mean little actions they have done or the fights they have had with other people, fights which (they realized afterwards) were all their own fault. Yet those human failings are the very points which interest the outside world, for it is only through our own mistakes and those of others that we can approach perfection.

I am, however, nervous as I unfold myself to you—I want to give you the saga of Megginch, to explain the details which I hope may be of profit, interest, or amusement to you, but to do this, I must show myself as I am and not in the glowing colours in which I like my friends to think of me!

I have known many people make mistakes and do things for which they have been very sorry afterwards, but I have never known anybody make the mistakes I have made, or do the numbers of things for which I have been very sorry afterwards! Yet from this network of tribulation I have managed to build up something and, looking back, living the years over again, I cannot see how I could really have acted otherwise.

One's life is not guided by what one later finds to be correct but by the circumstances, knowledge, and fashion which lead one into certain channels and modes of conduct. It is, for instance, easy to look back and say:

'Mr. Ramsay MacDonald was wrong to disarm,' or:

'Mr. Baldwin's policy of "Safety First" and *laissez-faire* led us into the war.'

Yet, let us face the truth, if we had been put in the place of MacDonald or Baldwin, should we not have been guided by fashion and prevailing ideas, just as they were?

You must understand then, to follow me, that I have never been able to look on modern commercial thought or the prevailing financial régime as real or lasting because, to my mind, they are based on a mis-

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

conception of fundamental laws which we cannot alter and which will ultimately win. You must also understand that I am an artist: this is not a convenient label for inefficiency and mistakes, believe it or not it means that I have, somehow, this cursed streak which keeps me striving for my conception of perfection through the expression of my own ego, even though this frequently entails my doing things contrary to the accepted belief of common sense.

There is something more. I must confess I have become, in some ways, rather mean. I subscribed, as a boy, ten shillings to the Prince of Wales's Fund. It was a supremely generous action on my part, for ten shillings in 1914 represented nearly the whole of my capital, while the spending power was phenomenal; I waited anxiously to know how my ten shillings had been spent but I never found out; it remains a mystery to this day and soured me permanently against Charitable Entertainments, Circulars, Appeals Weeks, even the modest Flag Day—I only give sparingly now.

I have also, at last, cut out giving money in response to begging letters; I have been stung so constantly and now believe all begging-letter writers are fraudulent. There was a 'clansman' to whom I sent money at intervals; he was always in a desperate state bordering on starvation and one day he wrote that his landlord was throwing him into the streets—so I asked the police to restrain action until I could find a way out. The police told me he was well off, owned his own house, kept his wife (and another woman), and was very often drunk! I was glad he was having such an entertaining life and it seemed in keeping with the adventurous nature of the Drummonds—however, to my horror, I was also told that, in his occupation of begging-letter writer, he joined whatever Clan suited his purpose! Certainly a clandestine individual! His real name was simply Smith!

Then there was the woman who needed the funeral expenses for her best friend, 'Daisy'; a month or two later I was helping to bury 'Maud', but hardly three weeks after we had buried 'Maud' 'Daisy' had died again. This time I sent the woman the money to buy a card-index as I felt her business methods were slovenly!

For many years also I helped a budding dramatist; starting by buying a typewriter we progressed in friendship until I paid his rent and betting losses! Unfortunately, it seemed no one was anxious to produce his plays, moreover he became wroth at any gentle criticisms

## HE TELLS OF HIMSELF

I made. He would write plays, in six acts, about duchesses. I pointed out that his duchesses were like none I had ever met and that I was sure you should really get down to duchesses before you wrote about them; so he switched over to writing four-act plays about earls! I introduced him to an earl to show how wrong his conception of them was, and he changed to writing shorter plays about Lesbians of mixed titles, and here I was unable to help him. I felt, however, we were getting nowhere in this aristocratic play-writing and tried to induce him to take up a more solid profession, such as plumbing. He went mad with me at this, wrote several abusive letters, and cured me of ever helping beggars again.

I have to be very strong-minded, being an adventurer myself, but my scrounging is on legitimate lines and I can honestly say I have never knowingly perpetrated a dirty trick on anyone. In spite of being scored off by numerous people for many years I still go on the principle, which is supposed to be fatal to any business, of trusting everybody; it never occurs to me that anybody wants to do me down. Ever since I succeeded to Megginch the doors of the house have been left unlocked; when people ask me 'Why?' I say, 'If somebody wants to come in, they' probably want something and I may be able to help them; if I lock the doors and they are determined to enter, they will break a window and do more damage; in any case there is nothing worth stealing'.

This system is not quite as crazy in practice as you might suppose. The last burglar came to prospect the land first and asked for a job; I gave him the price of a drink and he went off but returned later and (being a 'pro') came at too early an hour to be charged for house-breaking; he scorned the unlocked doors and climbed through a window, stole a few shillings from a guest's dressing-table and some valuable rings. Later, when apprehended by the police they appealed to him to say where he had hidden the rings and he showed them the place. Thus the incident passed off fairly quietly and without much loss.

My experience is that most men are prepared to give a good day's work for a good day's pay and are happier by being allowed to do this in their own way than by being regimented and bossed about. I cannot honestly say that, in a lifetime of trusting people, I have come off a loser; rather the reverse, for I am to-day a hundred per cent more



## CASTLE IN THE AIR

prosperous than when I started. My observations have inclined me to believe that if a person is sharp or crooked or deceitful or dishonest he is hurting no one but himself and the longer he continues in these practices the worse things get for him.

'Vengeance is mine' seems a very workable slogan.

Whatever we do to Hitler will be nothing to the misery he has caused himself and the same is true of all who try any of these rackets; they are repaid in their own currency.

Consider, then, as you read this story, my surroundings and upbringing, with the accompanying personal prejudices and biases, add to it this craze for perfection, stir in my philosophy of building for the future, couple this with (when tired) a cross temper, an overflowing sense of humour and the minimum amount of brain a head can contain, without rattling, and you have the author's portrait.

## *My World has no Bottom*

When my father died and I inherited a bag full of moonshine I discovered I had not been living in the same world as everybody else and that the outside world was not only quite different, but much tougher than I had supposed. I knew, of course, that we were broke and that it was in some way owing to the War (1914-18). I knew; for I had seen the smooth, ordered way of life disappear, had found the place slightly more dilapidated every time I came home, but no one seemed to worry unduly, things went on downhill but they went on as if there was no bottom to the hill. I realized then, for the first time, that I had been brought up in a fairy story and was still living in one; that old Mr. Stewart who taught me to tie trout-flies was really our butler, not the Chancellor to the make-believe court, and Mrs. Gow, who made meringues with pink cream filling for my birthday parties and who, I imagined, was some sort of a relation to a fairy godmother, was really a cook who had cooked herself to old age for a miserable wage in a mythical Ruritania. Yes, it all came pretty clear and sharp; the whole thing was a dream; we were not real at all.

## MY WORLD HAS NO BOTTOM

There were possibly at one time many families like mine all over the country; rural squires with their fairy castle domains living in each other's pockets, but they had all faded away, perhaps in the reign of Queen Anne. The outside world had changed; it was hard, relentless, with a completely different set of aims, ideals, can do's and can't do's, and we had just stayed still. I was glad my father never allowed himself to leave the fairy story. He remained unchanged in a changed world. He was, in his way, sensible; he realized the whole thing had got too much for him and that he was too old to pull it out. When he was dying he was back as a young Guardsman or Groom-in-Waiting to Queen Victoria or hunting at Melton, never anywhere near the present but there was a smile on his face; they must have been good days.

My old nannie remained also in the fairy story until she died. I have had associations of varying degrees with many women in my life, but my old nannie was the only one who taught me to be nice; I know also that every single thing she taught me was right and I would have been a much better man if I had followed her teachings.

When I see modern mothers parking their babies in Moses baskets while they tart up to go out to a party, or roaring at their daughters' dirty stories, I wonder how the modern girl or boy would react to a fairy-story mother. I have never told my mother one of my many rough stories (I would just as soon go on roller-skates down the aisle of York Minster) for she has a magic circle drawn around her and to go into that circle you must take off your shoes, stand for some time in strong sunlight, with a light sea breeze blowing over you and a smell of banksia roses; after a while, with your eyes closed thinking of a sunset, you can cross the border into my mother's inner world. With the modern mother you never leave the circle. You say, 'What's yours?' and she says, 'A Vortex Virgin', and you say, 'Bottoms up, Daisy', and she says, 'Straight down the hatch, old chump', . . . so there it is. You cannot compare the two mothers; neither is better than the other; they are similar to orchids and tea, you like one or the other or both, but you cannot compare them. It was the same with my fairy world and the outside world.

When my father died and I consulted our man of business as to what was to be done, how death duties were to be paid, how I should raise money to carry on with the estate, and so on, I realized for the first time that business men live on an entirely different plane from the one

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

I lived on; it was my first contact with materialism versus idealism. The business man smiled and pointed out that to pay death duties so much land would have to be sold and, after death duties had been paid, the property would not pay but could be sold and a sufficient amount from the sale invested to allow me to live elsewhere in a small way, with due economies.

You know the old stage gag, where the feed tells the comedian:

'The house is burning,' and the reply comes:

'Good, we won't have to light the fire'—and then the whole implication of the remark dawns upon the comedian and, realizing they are twenty stories up in a blazing building without a fire escape, he starts to run for the door.

It was the same on this occasion.

'Good,' I said, 'I will take a cottage in Cornwall and start water-colour painting.'

Then suddenly I realized what it all meant and laughed.

'Of course, I could not sell Megginch.'

'Oh, it's entailed,' he answered, 'we can . . .'

'No, it is not entailed, I just can't sell it.'

I forget what I said after that—some plausible excuse with which he agreed. In those youthful days I was afraid to tell people my real views because I knew they would think them rot. Even to-day I try not to say things which will hurt or worry people. In those days, when people laughed at me, I laughed too, but felt miserable—now it does not matter. In any case, I do not know if I could, even now, put down my reasons for not selling Megginch so that the average person could understand them.

I succeeded at a time when there was a demand for country houses, antique castles, picturesque gardens; there were purchasers who did not mind acquiring an unprofitable estate, because they looked upon the country as an expensive luxury. I knew a house and property which, at that period, was sold at a remunerative price for a moat and the visitors' book!

Another proprietor I knew in those days had a keeper in every farmhouse and the only time the ground was scratched was to grow a moderate crop of buckwheat, which was left standing for pheasant cover. Later the rabbits ate down the straw.

'A considerable number of persons were prepared to purchase

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country estates for amenity, even though they were not paying propositions.

My business friend's view was, therefore, founded on a great deal of common sense. I have often thought that if I had taken his advice (he even had a purchaser) it would have saved me years of worry, and I have not forgotten to think of all the amusing things one could have done as an independent man of means! However, I doubt if anyone could be really happy, having run away from life. I feel that—however impossible it seems—one should stand up to it and see what happens.

The figures my friend showed me came as something of a shock, for in my fairy story the ogre only appeared at fleeting intervals, said 'Boo', and shot away into the magician's bag; nor was I trained to business. I had, for instance, been to a school where all the boys seemed well-off and every one had an assured future—it did not really occur to me I had not got an assured future also. At this educational centre we learned subjects of little use to farmers. For hours, even years, I struggled to construct complicated verses in an inflected dead language, with the solitary encouragement that it was useful, being the foundation of modern languages—an assertion I doubted at the time and have since found to be a myth. To be honest, I must admit that (to use a racing expression) I 'pulled' a great deal over this education—endeavoured to give a semblance of keenness while not trying at all; for it seemed to me that once I could read, write, and had mastered the rudiments of arithmetic, it was a complete waste of time to try to learn the fancy subjects we were supposed to learn.

I never visualized a future in which I should have to ask for a railway ticket in Ancient Greek or know a girl who would welcome love-letters in Latin verse.

Curiously enough, the only subjects I was interested in which might, in my boyish opinion, be useful to know, happened to be the ones none of my friends wished to learn. The subjects of chemistry, physics, botany, 'zoology, mechanics, and kindred scientific pursuits were described by the one word 'Stinks'; it was difficult to learn the rudiments of any of these interesting things for the noise of the other pupils drowned the voice of the instructor; while the hours of study were cut to the minimum; the class began with a forest of raised hands;

"Please, sir, may I leave the room?"

**- This queue of lavatory seekers continued intermittently through the**

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

hour's instruction so that there was a procession of boys crashing in and out. The remainder of the pupils passed notes to each other, or drew pictures on graph paper. There were two boys, years older than myself, who caused no bother to anyone—they reserved the hour for sleep; at other classes, where sleep was not encouraged, they stared blankly ahead of them. It was not surprising that I was often top of these classes and even won prizes—there was no credit in these performances—it was simply that, amongst thirty or forty boys, I was the only starter.

This thirst for scientific knowledge would probably have made me very unpopular had not my complete ignorance of and disregard for the classics saved me in the eyes of my friends. I devised a system for these subjects, by means of which I escaped all extra work. It meant, however, that one had to pay for this idleness by a beating once a term. The beating with a birch on a bare behind was no joke; the weals showed when one bathed during the summer holidays—curious scarlet bands round to one's front—and it drew enough blood to stick one's shirt to one's skin, but it only took forty-eight seconds, and the bite one gave one's hand to prevent screaming was almost as bad; as the quarterly beatings got longer the bite became worse—several times I left toothmarks on my hand which showed for ages. However, I still think it was really worth while. We had a lot of extra time in which we were supposed to do classics and kindred mouldy subjects and, by my system, I was able to devote these hours to all sorts of amusing and diverting things. For instance, I read all those books, considered the gems of our language, which I have never had time to look at since. I learnt quite a lot about games. I taught myself several things about drawing and once managed to get to Windsor races. These pleasures made up for the beatings and being a few off bottom of the classical classes (I could never be the last for several boys were foreigners and could scarcely understand English).

Later, when I went into the Army I did not have the same educational troubles; military subjects are realistic, they aim at supreme efficiency; one can see their practical value from the beginning and so tries to acquire the knowledge as quickly as possible. Even Military Law is quite human at times.

Before leaving the subject of education, I must confess that years and years later I thought I would find out more about the classics and made

## MY WORLD HAS NO BOTTOM

a slight study of them; I am prepared to admit they have in many ways a considerable amount of interest and the knowledge is less difficult to acquire than I imagined when a boy. Nevertheless, even to-day I cannot see that they are of any use in a child's education. Far from being the gateway to modern languages I consider they are a cul-de-sac; their only value lies in the comparison of the earlier doctrines, art, and modes of thought with our modern conceptions—a comparison a young boy is unable to make because he has not the necessary experience to understand the beliefs of his own age.

To return to the interview with my man of business; I could see he considered me crazy not to cash in and save something from the wrack; he told me of many of his clients—old families with generation to generation places—who had sold in the boom and were able to live, more or less comfortably. With considerable perspicacity he outlined the future: the country-house boom would not go on, the day would come when the new rich would find more interesting ways of spending their money than on tumble-down castles and ruinous farms; there were signs (he assured me) that agriculture had reached its peak; the boom (in which the landlords had not shared owing to the prevalent custom of long leases) would be over; new leases would have to be made at much reduced rents, there might even be difficulty in finding tenants; he considered that taxation would rise while—with the general trend for public works—local rates would rise also, I knew somehow that what he said was true. It was true. It was a remarkably clever forecast and it came to pass.

I went away to think it all out.

My first thought was:

'I am the twentieth generation of my line, all these ancestors have struggled on, fought it out through seemingly impossible conditions—civil wars, plagues, famines; they have managed, somehow, to get through and I cannot be the one to say, 'Let's call it a day.'

My second thought was:

'We must use the talents we are endowed with, such as they are; I am very much luckier than most people and have been given a twenty-yard start; if I cash in I will, probably, be more fortunately placed than thirty millions of my fellow-countrymen; if I don't cash in, I am—on face value—worse off than most people (because one cannot be much worse off than being broke and well broke at that), but only on face

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value; if I have guts and use my head there must be some way of making the thing profitable.'

My last thought was:

'Everything is in a mess, the standard of living is low, the farms and houses are terrible, and yet—in spite of this—I was given the most wonderful presents by tenants and wellwishers when I came of age, and the local electors have shown confidence in me by electing me to the county council (the youngest councillor in Scotland!). I cannot just walk out and say, "It was fun, knowing you" '.

No, the easy way was unthinkable, I must take the hard way. I knew then—as I know now—it was the hard way; I knew I would have to fight every inch of it, that I was handicapped by not having business instincts, by being an idealist; I knew then—as I know now—that the odds were against my ever winning through. I know now—looking back—that it has been much harder than I imagined; it would be Hell to have to do it all over again; but if I could go back I know I would make the same decision. It is, I still think, the only decision a reasonable person could make.

## *Plotting the Course*

FOUR million five hundred and seventy-two thousand five hundred gallons of water have flowed down our small stream since I made my original plan for my life and my new system of agriculture.

The plan was laboriously written out in one of those exercise-books with a cover slightly reminiscent of blue-veined marble.

I have never shown my book to anyone—I would not have the face to do so for in it I have written simply everything I wanted to do in life. Reading it now makes me a little sad, for I no longer wish to do some of the things and it seems impossible that I shall ever achieve some of the others; I am taken back—by some of the phrases—into a past I had forgotten. I am amazed to realize what nice ideas I then had and amazed at my own optimism; yet that optimism has been justified

## PLOTTING THE COURSE

for a number of the seeming impossibilities I planned then have been carried out. It makes me wonder if the majority of people make plans for their lives—and stick to them—or if they just go on waiting for what turns up next.

I am likewise amazed at the details I went into and at the proportion of the original plan which has (in spite of changing circumstances) remained practicable.

I did not believe that beef cattle, wheat, or hens would ever pay in this country; I still think the same about beef cattle and wheat, but I now think that hens might, possibly, be made to pay.

The original plan provided a map of the finished property and this excluded hill ground; grouped the lowland farms and distributed their products from a central point. That somewhat surprises me because for a long time I thought I ought to have hill farms in the scheme as well and have only recently dropped the idea; my experience has shown me that hills farms require an entirely different technique and there is no particular advantage in linking them with intensive lowland farms. And yet, in some way, years ago I had hit upon this truth when I formulated the plan, without experience. My reasoning then was:

‘Sheep will not pay because they rob the ground and can only be profitable on very large stations where the ground is not heavily rated and can be left to recover.’

I remember now that this idea was borrowed from an Australian girl friend—hence the word ‘station’—she had seen British farming and was surprised that anyone should take it seriously. At times, since then, I have thought, ‘Sheep might be profitable’, but now I have returned to my original view and believe that what I thought then is correct. Sheep, to be profitable, require vast acreages of dirt-cheap land while the lowland type of sheep will never pay sufficiently to make it worth while keeping them.

A tour of Europe, with a study of its past agricultural history, will, or should, convince anybody that this is right, for sheep have gradually disappeared from European farming in proportion to the increase on the value of the land and rise in population.

In the old exercise-book I recorded my belief in dairy cattle in herds of about forty cows and in farms of about a hundred and fifty acres. Now this fact is interesting because there was a long period during which I held the idea of a very large farm with a three hundred cow



## CASTLE IN THE AIR

herd; it seemed to promise a considerable saving of labour and the possibility of mechanization with large, massive implements was opened up. Fortunately, I did not put these ideas into practice; I was actually influenced against doing so by seeing a very large herd of dairy cows on a very large farm. This showed me the disadvantages in a manner no theory could have done. There are three main snags:

- (1) The distance the stock and dung have to go to the faraway fields,
- (2) The increased risk of disease, and
- (3) The difficulty of giving individual attention to the herd.

These disadvantages far outweigh the advantages. There is no saving of labour either, for, whether by machine or hand, a man can only milk a certain number of cows.

My ideal herd is now fifty-two cows, that is to say about forty in milk; for this size herd the services of three people are required for attention and maintenance; by carefully arranging the milking machine two people can milk the herd and so regular days off and proper holidays can be arranged. Thus, after thinking differently on practically every point, I have—in the end—returned to the original exercise-book plan.

The sale of milk direct to the customer has always seemed the greatest chance for the farmer and the backbone of the industry. The reason for this is obvious. Milk is sold by large business on a big scale and the price has to be kept in the profitable zone, otherwise the shareholders will kick. Now, big business and shareholders are magic words in this country—shareholders comprise all classes and conditions, and when they kick they kick hard. The investment in the milk business runs into millions—probably the shareholders do too—also, milk is our most vital food and the one commodity no government dare let down.

For this reason my original plan focused on milk as the first line of attack, with pigs, vegetables, and fruit as subsidiary products. I considered it would be wise to grow oats, barley, wheat, hay, beans; linseed, kale, swedes, and mangolds and to use all these products for stock feed. The only cash crops I planned to sell off the farms were potatoes and vegetables and I decided to restrict these cash crops to a fifteenth of the acreage of the farm. I aimed at stocking the holdings very heavily and purchasing about twenty-five per cent of my stock feed from

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abroad. I considered that, as the farms became stocked and the temporary leys rotated round the fields, fertility would increase rapidly, while the vast amounts of farmyard manure the heavy stocking would produce would augment this fertility still further. I believed that, in due course, artificial manure would be unnecessary and then the imports to the property would be limited to the twenty-five per cent stock feed, lime, tractor fuel, and implements. My plan aimed at selling all the produce of the farms direct to the consumer.

For this purpose I wished to knit the various farms together around a central nucleus to consist of office, laboratory, workshops, granary (in which to manufacture and store the home-grown and purchased products into cake for redisposal to the farms), dairy (to deal with the milk products), egg-grading station, and bacon factory and soup-making plant (for processing the stream of pigs from the different farms and making soup from the unwanted bull calves).

I cannot tell you how ambitious this original plan—as set down in my exercise-book—was, and how utterly impossible it seemed to carry out; it could not even be started for many years as the farms were let to tenants on long leases while the whole place was in a God-forsaken mess—it also meant pouring in an incredible amount of capital, with no chance of it paying its way for a good number of years—even now, after twenty years, I have still taken nothing out but let every penny go back into the place.

## *Reconnaissance*

**M**egginch is really an old island; 'inch' means island.

The Carse of Gowrie was, originally, a much wider estuary than it is to-day; even in fairly recent times it was sprinkled with sizeable marshes. Place names (like 'The Myres') suggest reeds and oozing mud; there is even a ring somewhere, attached to a stone, supposed to have been an ancient mooring-place for boats, but—to put it as politely as possible—this is unlikely!

The inch on which the old castle stands is fifty feet above sea-level

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

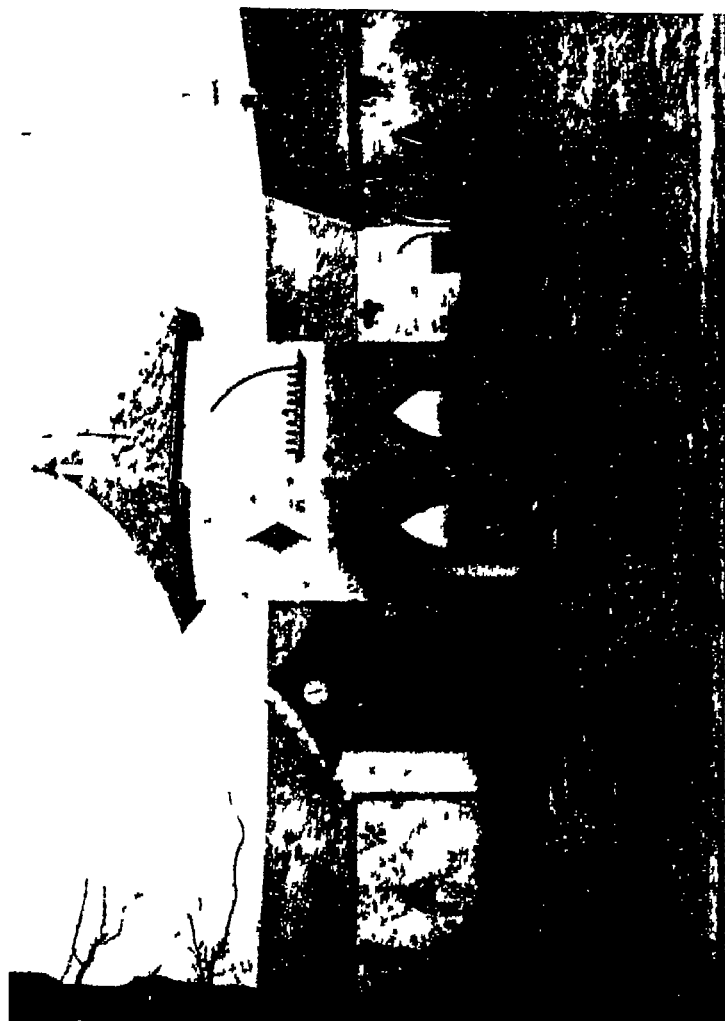
and the surrounding plain goes down to fifteen feet. In the ice age the valley must have been a sizeable glacier; large boulders, covered with ice scratches, still project suddenly in the fields. The soil varies from pure boulder clay to rich loam, with intervening grades of sandy clay. On the whole they are what a farmer would call 'strong soils'. A strong soil is harder to cultivate than a light soil. The secret of successful heavy land farming, I should say, is 'Never go on the land when it is wet'. In order even to approximate to this rule so that ideal weather conditions may be seized one must have very much more force per acre available than a farmer on light land; to be lastingly successful one needs to have enough force available to do an abnormal amount in the few good days of a really bad season. It is for this reason that so much heavy land has reverted to grass in times of depression.

A visiting farmer—taking up a portion of carse soil—would say, 'Wheat and bean land', but that is not the whole story, for we can grow magnificent crops of clover hay, while there are patches of good potato land and, although in some places troublesome, roots give a good yield. A land which can grow four tons of rotational hay to the acre is certainly worth treasuring.

In ancient times the district was drained by digging ditches across the fields—the most obvious method of getting rid of melting snow—a practice *still* carried out in many northern countries, though it reduces the area of cultivated land considerably. As we became more civilized a grid of drainage ditches was formed which exist to the present day—these ditches were (and are) known as pows; later again, this drainage was supplemented by making brush drains in the fields and these were subsequently changed to tile drains.

The population of the district is of fairly mixed origin—pure Pictish types are not uncommon, but I should say the majority are of Norse extraction; many are extremely Nordic-looking while pure Norse names are fairly common. My grandmother, for instance, was called Oswald and traced her descent to a Viking commando raid some centuries ago. Through the passage of time our dialect, like others, has blended into a pattern emerging with a definite accent—although this Scotch is gradually melting under the influence of increased education and the 'refined' accent of the British Broadcasting Corporation.

The effect of geographical situation on accent is interesting for, if one crosses less than a mile of water to the south, one finds life is the



THE STABLE YARD



SCOT COWPER AND KATHOLE KATE

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prevailing dialect, while a few miles over the Sidlaw Hills to the north the accent is that of Angus; fifteen miles to the east one meets the different speech of Dundee and nine miles to the west Perth is spoken.

An awkward man I hardly knew told me suddenly, 'This is the woman I love.' He fumbled in his wallet and from inside his identity-card handed me a photograph, remarking, 'She is the most beautiful girl in the world'. I made some appropriate remark as I looked at the hypo-stained snapshot—but I knew what he meant. We were not looking at the same female! He did not see the stodgy little thing, with the squinty eyes and the drab hair that I saw; his picture was built up of a number of sacred memories stretching, perhaps, over years! He saw her as she glowed when flirting so outrageously at that dance, he remembered the smell of her hair as it fell over his face, and the way she said, 'I'll never love anybody like I love you'.

It is the same with Megginch. I remember the smell of the lilacs in the garden in spring, the peaceful drone of bees in the lime-trees on a warm summer's day, the sight of the red rowans on the Sidlaws in autumn; but you would only see a scraggy old house, surrounded by telephone-poles, feel the piercing sting of the east wind, and observe the stale flatness of the surrounding country. I believe, though, that if I could manage to take you on one of our three warm days, on the one neither misty or wet, to a place I know about a couple of miles off, you would say, 'Better than I expected'. For you would see the Carse of Gowrie laid out at our feet with its differently coloured fields and its prosperous, tidy, appearance; you could follow the silver stream of the Tay flowing southwards and then, about a hundred biscuit throws off, see the Fife Hills with the two Lomonds by Kinross, and so on to Berwick Law, Arthur's Seat, and the distant Lammermuirs. About turn! and—spreading to the north—you could see green Strathmore, Birnam Hill, Beinnaghlo, Schiehallion, and the blue outlines of the Cairngorm and Invernesshire Hills. Then, if I could entice you, we would walk a couple of hundred yards and get an intriguing view of the West Perthshire mountains, stretching to Argyleshire.

But, of course, you might say (as a friend of mine did):

'If the earth was flat you could show me Mount Everest!'

'Or Claridge's snack counter,' I retorted sourly.

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

### *Scrounging*

**T**he first step was to get, by some means, cash to carry on with and to use to make more cash.

It was, obviously, impossible to do anything about the house and property; to put the whole place into spick-and-span order would (and has) cost a fortune; the money I have spent on Megginch would give me an income sufficient to run a super flat in London, take a really good river in Norway, spend the winter in Florida, give expensive presents to my friends, have a couple of horses in training and never be overdrawn at the bank! but the interest the property could pay, let to tenant farmers and householders (even if done up and everything put into first-class order) would only be sufficient to let me do repairs and exist. I would have to make a suit of clothes last until it fell off, boots would be a big problem, and a visit to the pictures in the nearest town an exciting event, looked forward to for weeks beforehand.

The house contained several works of art of considerable value, but I did not wish to dispose of them as they were all part and parcel of the Megginch Saga—family portraits and the like. However, I did sell a number of valuable books, although I could not bring myself to part with a first edition of *Captain Cook's Voyages*—the maps are fascinating, and it is grand to visualize a world of which so much had to be marked white, because nobody had been there. Nor did I like selling Dürer's *Wood Cuts*—it is a fine book and the craftsmanship is superb—but I hardened my heart.

There was a very fine full-length supremely decorative portrait of my great-grandfather's sister and her daughter, by Angelica Kauffmann—a wonderfully coloured picture, the shades blending to convey the richness of an old tapestry, the pose original, and the period costume delightful. The daughter married the Howard de Walden of those days. I approached her descendant (reputed to be fabulously wealthy) to find out if he would care to purchase this picture. He was altogether charming and we came to a gentleman's agreement without any bargaining, contracts, or formality. A few days later a delightful letter arrived and with it a cheque (the cheque was not referred to in the

## SCROUNGING

letter). I held in my hand the largest sum of money I had ever possessed, I have actually never received such a big cheque since. I could not resist measuring the picture to find out how much it was worth per square inch. Curiously enough, I have always regretted selling it and still dream of the day when—fabulously rich—I shall buy it back, allowing good interest, in the same gentlemanly manner. In its place hangs a Rubens which I have tried all my life to sell—a mammoth picture depicting Henri Quatre besieging Paris—far too large for the room; I long to get a good price and say good-bye to it but, unfortunately, it is also too large for other people's houses. Museums have taken it for loan collections; it is popular for this form of exhibition as it fills up a lot of space quickly and gives the visitors plenty to look at and there is much to look at in it—men in armour, cavalry, old Paris, landscape, and all sorts. I nearly sold it once to a man in the American show business who was going to make a special house to fit it; I don't think he minded much what the picture was like, he wanted one large picture by a reputable old master and this fitted the bill, but, unfortunately, the American slump came and so Henri continues to besiege Paris in my drawing-room.

Looking back now and knowing how hard it is to acquire money quickly I realize the Angelica sale was something approaching a miracle, and that I was amazingly lucky for, on schedule, I was able to appear again before my man of business and square the death duties up so that the place could go on. I had not, of course, sufficient funds to make it *de luxe*; it would have to remain an eyesore in the district where wealth, amassed in the war, was being expended on properties without regard to revenue or economics; in fact, the majority of our British soil had changed ownership overnight, from the old hereditary landlord to the new amenity landlord.

I am not a prejudiced type of person and so could not avoid seeing this new type of landlord was a first-class thing for the country; men keen to spend large sums on improvements without counting the cost. I knew also that, by holding on without capital, I was doing (in some ways) a selfish thing—for I might have sold out to a rich man who could have put the property in order as quickly as a duck shakes its tail. But I felt then, and still feel, that such lavish expenditure on a system which did not pay was wrong. I knew by the level of farm rents that no landlord could get a reasonable return for his capital; I knew, by farm



## CASTLE IN THE AIR

prices, that rents could not rise and give the farmer an adequate return for his capital.

It seemed to me that the landlord-tenant system was finished and that any money thrown into it was merely prolonging the agony. I also thought it a bad method because the landlord took an unfair part in the partnership; he provided farm-buildings, farm-houses, cottages, drained the ground, was responsible for keeping down vermin, ditched, hedged, fenced, and looked after the roads—did everything except put money into the bank, so for years I had been thinking out ways of going the little further and doing the whole thing. Even now my opinion is unaltered; the landlord-tenant system expects the landlord to do too much for too little, while it misses one advantage of the feudal system, the co-operation and united family spirit. In the intervening twenty-five years things have got much worse, for the tenant has had his powers increased seventy per cent while the landlord and the farm servant have been thrust more and more into the cold.

I expounded the gist of my new system to my man of business who listened attentively and was quite interested.

'There might be something in it. How long do you think it will take you to start up?'

'First,' I explained, 'I shall have to go away and work to try and make some capital; I want also to get some experience of people and life generally, for I can see that my upbringing has fitted me to be nothing more than a good sport. I want to find out what the world is really like outside my cotton-wool wrappings; I have plenty of time to do this for the first lease does not fall in for six years; then I must return and take over each farm as the lease comes in, until I farm all the ground necessary to make my plan work; eventually I hope to have the whole place transformed from the old landlord-tenant system to my new plan and then I think it will pay, provide a good standard of living all round, and enable Megginch to go on as an economic unit.'

'How long will your plan take?' he asked curiously, and smiled when I told him:

'Twenty years from the time I take over the first farm.'

He said nothing for some time, then:

'You'll never stick to it all that time.'

'As a matter of fact,' I said, 'I will, all that time and longer—thirty years—until I die—always—I'll never give in until it is finished.'

## SCROUNGING

I have often wished my friend could have lived a little longer; when he 'departed this life' (the right expression for a family lawyer) my affairs were still in an apparently hopeless muddle, the carefully thought-out plan looked impossible to bring off. At one of our last interviews he said sadly:

'Why don't you give in gracefully? It is no use banging your head against a wall; years ago you could have sold out at a profit, now things are so hopeless all you can do is to get out all square.'

'Don't worry,' I told him, 'my luck's just round the corner. I'll pull it off, although it may take a year or two longer than I thought originally.'

He looked at me strangely.

I knew in my heart that I could never let all the old Johns and Adams down; they had fought so hard, had won the soil originally from the raw, had scraped and persevered until they got the wretched conditions of the feudal system altered into the mistaken ideal of the landlord-tenant system.

There were, however, two big doubts:

(1) Would it ever, in existing world conditions, be possible to make agriculture profitable in this country? It certainly seemed unlikely in those days.

(2) What about the political aspect? How long would it be feasible for the original pioneer to carry on as an individual?

It was not a simple matter like rustling up a few Campbells or attacking our friends, the Murrays—we were not fighting flesh and blood any more.

Some years later I argued with an important income-tax official. I had spent the money that should have gone to Caesar on farm buildings. I longed to push the dignified man through the window but instead we discussed the matter in an impersonal fashion.

'You know, we have the power to put you in gaol and hold your body until payment is made.'

Of course I did not know—but it warmed my heart to hear him talk that way; he was, at least, human enough to threaten and maybe a man who threatens will also fight. But we got back to the dignified manner again.

'Do you know,' I said, 'my buildings are falling in, the tile drainage, which cost a fortune to instal, is silted up, there are rushes in good

## CASTLE IN THE AIR

fields? I cannot see it all go this way, I *must* do something—these taxes I pay you do me no good.'

'You can obtain a maintenance allowance.'

It was a point for Rex.

'I know,' I said, 'but why can't I just spend my own money and get the place put right before it all goes?'

He had no answer to that but gave me time to pay and I was off on the money hunt once more. A few years later I was in the same room again; we had struggled on a little, the very worst was nearly over, but this time taxation was higher and there was more to argue about. The gaol business came up again. For a second I pictured myself strolling round in the debtors' prison at Newgate, dicing my sock-suspenders against somebody's loaf of bread.

'We can hold your body.'

The same awful words, but this time I hit back.

'Suppose now I sell up and clear out, the country will be my taxes the poorer.'

'Where would you go?'

'Sweden, without a doubt; there are no slums, everybody is kindly and well dressed, they farm beautifully, and the government are efficient and work *in with* the individual instead of *against* him.'

The official considered this idea for some time.

'But what is wrong with this country?'

Ten minutes later, seeing the man was growing tired, I finished with this peroration:

'Every previous generation in this country got things as good as they could, with the experience and resources they had, but this generation has not. Our slums are terrible, our agricultural land is going back to scrub. Why? Because the individual is taxed out of existence and the Government use the money thus wrung uneconomically.'

'And, pray, why uneconomically?'

'Suppose,' I said, 'you are paid a thousand a year—and from what I have seen of your money-getting powers, you must be worth that sum—and I am taxed a thousand pounds. All right—let me finish! I could build two first-class cottages with that thousand, with electric light and bathrooms. In ten years there would be twenty such cottages but in ten years you have produced nothing.'

## SCROUNGING

I forget how the argument went after that; I think he said that my money could be used more efficiently by the Government to create suitable buildings and I said that if that was so, why did they not go ahead and do it, but I know that I had to pay up in the end. Still, Megginch was a little further on and that was what mattered to me

If you ask anyone, 'What are the difficult fences on the Aintree course?' they are sure to say 'Beechers'; one of the most celebrated steeplechase obstacles in the world, but nine out of a dozen will omit to tell you of the chair fence and this is the hardest of the whole course. I was over 'Beechers' Brook and into the straight when I found my horse had not the strength to make the chair fence, the last obstacle between me and the judge. The '39 war had caught me on one foot and I was forced into expenditure that I had not, and (for once) could not have scheduled for. I went to Jock (you will find his picture about the book)—he has been my best friend for just over thirty years; when you are very fond of someone you hate sponging on them, so I hated asking.

'Jock,' I said, 'I have not the corn to get over the Chair,' a remark incomprehensible to most people.

'Of course,' Jock said simply, and then went straight on to another subject. I thought, however, it would be civil to acknowledge his kindness, which I did:

'When you consider how my dough is spent,  
If I should bust, think only this of me  
That, as I farm away your last remaining cent,  
I am dreaming, Oh my darling love, of thee.'  
—*With apologies to J. Milton, R. Brooke, E. Wallace, S. C.  
Fletcher, and His Grace.*

Jock and I have an expression we use about anything:

'It would never do for His Grace.'

I have never met anyone with Jock's charm, generosity, or intelligence. If he had a gold plate stuck behind his head and sat on a dry-cleaned merino cloud it would be the proper setting.

## *Part Two*

### Spring Cleaning

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#### *Not Quite Stationery*

**T**he New Office' is less new than might be imagined, but this courtesy title is used to distinguish it from the old office—a dark, damp hole of a place (with sweating walls) which frequently had to be evacuated owing to the smell from poisoned rats under the floor.

The new office is approached by an external flight of ten steps and consists of four parts:

- (1) The entrance—with filing cabinets and desk.
- (2) The inner office—with safe, typewriter, and telephone.
- (3) The store—where we endeavour to keep a supply of all spares for the different machines used on the estate, and
- (4) The wash-up, coat-hanging compartment—one wall of which is taken up with rubber spares for milking machines, as this compartment is cool, fairly dark, and otherwise suitable for this purpose.

Our bookkeeping is on orthodox lines; submitted annually to chartered accountants. We have three accounts. The estate, to which each farm pays a book entry rent and which, in return, provides the central organization, collective bookkeeping, marketing foodstuffs, etc., besides doing all the capital account work of new buildings and the routine work of repairs, ditching, etc. It is into the estate account that I have had to pour a constant stream of money, a stream which must continue until the last cottage is rebuilt. This expenditure, of course, represents our capital which one day, we hope, will pay a dividend.

The second account is the farm account. This deals with the financial transactions of the different farms and supplies the farm wages.

The third is the pig account. With war prices, the farm, pig, and

## NOT QUITE STATIONERY

poultry accounts remain healthy while the estate account, which purchases commodities in a rising market, is pathologic.

During business hours Corky will probably be found at the telephone, being polite but firm. On formal occasions I refer to Corky as 'my secretary, Miss McCorquodale', but she is really part of the fairy-story family and all the family are known by nicknames—~~she~~ <sup>she</sup> am, for example, called J.D. From her eyrie (with windows facing in every direction) Corky follows the workings of the estate centre and is ready at all times to clear up knotty problems on every manner of subject.

Sheila is Corky's assistant and has the real Scotch thirst for mind improvement, so much so that she has been ordered by her doctor to give up the study of (I think) Spanish, which she was gaily embarking upon in the late hours of the night; she has already crammed herself with a storehouse of learning by dint of overtime study. Sheila believes in a tough school of efficiency, a little at variance with my endeavours for 'Strength through Joy'. However, both Corky and Sheila have faith in our plan. They understand, perhaps better than anybody else, the apparently immovable obstacles that have—at times—seemed to make fulfilment impossible, while Corky has watched the straightening out and gradual building of the plan from a complete and apparently hopeless muddle.

I think it says something for idealism that they have stuck it for so long and deliberately worked for salaries much lower than their capabilities could command, in order to help the plan forward.

Corky should have been a diplomat. There are times when we shriek at each other in the office over something that has gone wrong; in the middle of a heated flow of words Corky will lift the receiver, in answer to a call, and speak to someone with great charm and smoothness but, immediately the receiver is replaced, the argument continues from the exact point where it was broken off.

In wartime Corky's job—and indeed mine also—is exasperating, as we constantly need things desperately and immediately, yet nothing can be obtained before endless forms have been filled in and endless questions answered; the correspondence drags on for weeks and then—when finally we have obtained the licence for what is needed—a new correspondence starts up with the manufacturers. We keep on trying, and if we fail to get a licence we start hunting the secondhand markets all over the country. I do not know how—without Corky's energy—

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we could have kept going these last years, for most people would find the bookkeeping and other work a full-time job without anything else, but the office struggles on; we sometimes cheer ourselves by remembering what it was like before the war, before control was heard of, and—thus encouraged—we vaguely look forward to non-control days again and the completion of the plan.

I do not think there is anything very novel or exciting about our office methods; we file, card-index, and correspond in the usual way. Corky or Sheila make tea round about four o'clock; a stream of people come in and out, the telephone rings intermittently. All this, I suppose, would apply to most offices in most businesses—perhaps the only difference is that I cannot dictate letters, so Sheila's mastery of the shorthand craft is wasted. This dictation complex is of long standing—years ago, when I worked in London, I had a secretary; a beautifully turned-out, glamorous secretary, who had the effect of making me feel unshaven; she had won an international competition for shorthand typists and, being the wife of someone else in the office, had come to help out. She gave me a ravishing smile and seated herself at the typewriter.

'I can type as fast as you talk!' She did!

'Dear Sir, . . . Yours of the fourteenth. Have you got that?'

'Yes.'

'We have now had the opportunity for a talk with your representative. Have you . . . ?'

'Yes.'

We got about half-way through the letter and I found her assertion was correct—she typed exactly the same pace, however fast I talked. I could not go on. I got lost in a maze of 'which's'.

One evening the prize-winning, glamorous typist asked me to go to a cinema; her husband also accompanied us. He told me:

'You won't enjoy it. She'll tell you how badly I have treated her all the way through.'

As a prophet the husband was miraculous.

The pictures, in those days, were quieter than they are now—a few stringed instruments played Rubinstein's melody very softly; in tune with this accompaniment the prize-winning typist told me the depressing story of her married life—point by point; it lasted out the feature picture, the news, the second feature, the two turns, and con-

## SAFE DEPOSIT

tinued softly through the 'King'; it attracted the attention of our neighbours in the auditorium, who found it more interesting than the programme. I have seldom felt more uncomfortable. The only remark made by the husband as we parted was:

'I was right, wasn't I?'

The combination of these two incidents affected my powers of dictation permanently.

Fortunately, however, Sheila knows letter-writing, so I just say, 'Tell him . . .' 'Tell him—so and so,' and she composes a neat and purposeful business letter.

## *Safe Deposit*

**A**cross the way from the office is the central food-store, grinding and mixing plant, etc. It was for many years a dream. I had seen it built, finished, and working, so long in my imagination that I did not get excited when, one day, all this became an accomplished fact.

The granary—as some call it—is a composite building, thrown together from *my* unprofessional designs and Joe Stewart's masonry skill. It is composed from the fundamental remains of:

1. The old laundry.
2. The old clothes' drying room.
3. The old meat larder.
4. The coal store.
5. The apple room.
6. The stoke pit for the conservatory, and—lastly—
7. A small walled yard that housed a couple of garden barrows, a number of pea stakes and one large, cracked, glazed pot.

My youngest child can—and does—run about through the granary without realizing the mysteries from which it sprang; had she been alive in 1907 she could have gone into the laundry and found Margaret—very clean and starched—plumping sheets up and down in a row, of wooden troughs; she could have persuaded Margaret to show her the



## SPRING CLEANING

neat cupboard where the golden bars of soap were piled, and been warned off the huge mangle—a museum piece—with wooden rollers as big as twenty-year-old larch, operated by a fine display of eighteenth-century ironwork which, doubtless, had some mechanical significance. One had to be careful with this giant mangle for generations of children had had their fingers pinched in it—I think I was the last. Down some steps in the drying-room my youngest—April (called so for obvious reasons)—would have had the pleasure of inhaling one of the ten finest smells in the world, ‘hot-ironed linen’. She would, however, have found difficulty in getting into the meat larder as Mr. Stewart did not consider it nice for young ladies to see a skinned bullock dripping blood on the sawdust-covered floor. I am not able to explain Mr. Stewart to you for there is no modern counterpart; one might call him a butler, I suppose, but—on the other hand—how many butlers would have driven into the Perth market to buy cattle, or gone out shooting with my father to try a new pointer? No! There is not a word to describe Mr. Stewart. He came in my grandfather’s time, when twelve, and died when eighty-six—still working. Mr. Stewart was sweet, and my! *what* he knew about fishing!

I would have liked April to see the coal-store best in July, when it was filled. A clause in the leases enforced tenants to drive so many ‘coup carts’ full of coal from the wagons at Inchconans siding. It was a great day, with harness shining and a couple of horses to a cart. I can see them now—great eighteen-hand Clydesdales, with ribbons on their tails and their steel collar-hames like polished silver. There was a barrel of beer, too, and a good many jokes flying around between different farms. It was a joyful occasion while a feeling of prosperity prevailed and a sense of rural security one does not get now, when the lorry-driver says, ‘Here’s the line,’ and—touching a lever—hydraulically tips his truck into the new coal-cellar—a microscopic affair compared with the old one.

The granary is run alternatively by Jock Macgregor and Duncan, both full-time Black Watch men. It is run alternatively because, in its early stages, we were troubled with dust and Jock got coughing fits; later we tracked up the vulnerable places and put in exhaust fans but, even though the dust menace abated, it seemed a good idea for these men to work one month indoors and one month out, so we have stuck to it.

## SAFE DEPOSIT

The idea of the granary is to collect the grain, beans, etc., off the different farms on the estate, condition, store, grind, and finally combine it with purchased protein for re-issue to the farms as feeding-stuffs.

We hope by this means to make considerable savings and keep an eye on the rationing of the stock at the same time; to know exactly, at any given moment, how we are off for supplies and how much surplus we can sell. To record the stock in hand each storage vault is fitted with a slate, upon which the amount in and out is marked; a walk down the passage between the two lines of silos shows, at a glance, our position. We have also installed a thermometer above these slates sticking into the bin, so that if any parcel of grain should start heating we can detect it at once and change the bin over or, in extreme cases, put it through the drier again. Actually the worst heating can usually be stopped by using cold air only in the drier.

Incidentally, the holding capacity of the granary is five hundred tons of grain and there is space for purchased feeding-stuffs as well.

As I write we are fitting a further improvement—an Avery weighing-machine—under a hopper at the outlet end, with the idea that the sacks can be weighed directly on the weighing machine; formerly we lugged the sacks on and off the weigher adding or subtracting grain from a near-by sack. The new idea is a specially controlled spout, which gradually cuts off the flow of grain, so that one can weigh direct, to half an ounce or so. Dunc. Cunningham rather confused me when the new weigher arrived.

‘Here, man, I can weigh a patch.’

‘A patch?’ I asked—puzzled.

‘Come along and hae a squint!’

Dunc. showed me that the weighing machine was sensitive enough to notice the difference between a patched and an unpatched sack. Dunc. and I—used for a lifetime to the ordinary farm weigher which wobbles about a pound either way—‘look’d at each other with a wild surmise’.

The granary could not have had a worse start; not only was it half-built, with only three-quarters of the necessary equipment when harvest began, but, we were desperately short of labour. However, we managed through—thanks, mostly, to guests,

I must explain the guests,

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Megginch is not one of the barrack type of country houses but it is roomy. It has not been taken over for any military organization because it is up one stair, down the next, filled with corners, and not really adaptable for any normal form of existence—for these reasons it was turned down as a hospital. After the early evacuees had gone I thought we ought to do something patriotic with it so we housed—and endeavoured to entertain—Canadian and other officers or men on leave who have no particular place to go.

We have been fortunate in having had the most wonderful bunch of boys. One chap wanted to know how the farms worked and came round with me to see.

'You remind me of my boss,' he said

'Who's your boss?'

'Production manager of Ford's, Detroit!'

I considered this something of a compliment as I have only one telephone and can imagine his boss sitting in a room with at least a dozen. He went on:

'I told my boss one day he should tie a broom to his backside so he could sweep the floor as well.' I thought that a classic!

Of course, nothing like the Megginch family has ever been seen in the Colonies or, I expect, in this country; it usually comes as something of a shock. I could never explain the idea to Bill and Homer, two charming Virginians, who stayed with us; they had the most beautiful manners I have ever seen and they cautioned me to relax.

'Ye don wan a get like them Yankcees, all hustle, bustle—John; take it easy, relax.'

I wish I could spin out 'relax' the way they did—it became the most restful word in our language!

One hardly likes a man who has at last got leave after his thirty raids to do dirty work on the farm, but our guests have been very helpful to us—at the time of the drier installation they saved our life.

A friend of mine—Jimmy Stewart Grainger, who looks like cleaning up the heart-throb business for British films—was with us when the drier started. Dave, Joe, and Bert had worked night and day for weeks, getting it in on time for the harvest, but although the machine had been on order for a long time, it was Battle of Britain days and we could not get all of it. I made a starter for the electric motor out of a trough filled with salt and water and two lead plates; one moved them

## CUDDIES TO CONCRETE

nearer together to make a resistance—it worked without a hitch until the proper starter showed up a year later.

The harvest started with the drier in a horrible mess. Grain was coming in all day long, in two-ton tractor loads. We had everybody who could walk on at the harvest, so Jimmy and I took on night shift. Lifting two tons of grain in sacks each hour all night after a harassing day makes you sweat, but we stuck it out until a lot of things happened at once; whilst putting on one of the many belts which flew off continuously, I got a finger squashed between it and the driving pulley; Jimmy got called back to the army in the middle of his leave, and it started to rain, so that the night shift was no longer necessary.

The drier now is a very different affair from what it was in those days, but there is still a certain amount to be done to it before it can reach my standard of perfection. However, it works and that—in farming—means a great deal!

## *Cuddies to Concrete*

**T**he joiner's shop has always been my favourite achievement, not because it is particularly showy, but because it was my first effort at tearing down the cobwebs and starting things going again.

The old joiner's shop had come to an end before I was born, by the death of the carpenter and the extinction of his family. They had been carpentering with us for some generations. When the joiner died the door of the shop was locked and everything remained as the old man had left it.

Later on, when I was a boy, the door fell down and we used to play about in the shop! An air of excitement hung around the place for one could fall through the wooden stairs—I did once go right through the floor. I can remember the faded curls of shavings lying on the ground and a very worm-eaten beechwood jack-plane that I contrived to straighten and use; there was also a stone-hard barrel of paint or patty downstairs—I was never sure which. Below a swallow's nest there was

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a rack which still contained a few panes of glass and, amongst the floor dirt, I found enough clout-nails and sound wood to make a moderately serviceable rabbit hutch.

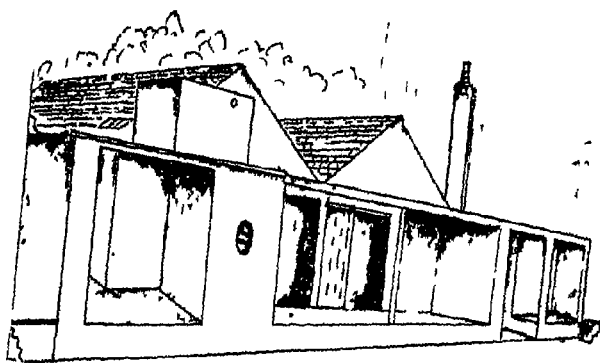
If the joiner's shop was ruinous the corner house next door was decidedly worse. This was a large, dank place, into which the daylight never penetrated. A sheepskin hung from a rusty hook high up; everything that nobody wanted and which looked untidy outside had been thrown in; we often searched it for treasures, but even my sister, Victoria (who won *Truth's* Children's Toy Making Competition at the Albert Hall three years running, could fashion miraculous things from hairpins, and knew how to solder and do untold wonders), could find nothing useful in the 'Corner House'.

While still at school I had made the plans for the new joiner's shop—it was to combine the Corner House, be airy, and filled, with every modern machine. As I grew up the place wilted more and more and the chances of even putting a slate on the roof, far less modern machines in, seemed very remote.

However, there seems to be a law that, if you can hold to your ideal steadfastly enough the dream will come true and every time I go into the present joiner's shop I remember how impossible it once seemed while now it has been an accomplished fact for years: a bandsaw, thicknessing machine, planer, circular saw, morticing machine, tenoner, etc., all with their own electric motors so that one merely presses a button and the machine springs into action.

Every Saturday young Sandy Stewart sweeps the whole place clean and collects the tools. We have even fixed the various spares, saws, and keys to the wall in such a way that nothing else can be piled on them. True, we could improve the walls which remain, except for whitewash, exactly as they were when 'Duncan the carpenter' was wielding his adze in 1820; but that must wait until the plan is finished, the last cottage done up, and we return to do a final sweetening of the whole place.

Dave Stewart is a remarkably good joiner; no job ever leaves the shop that is not perfect; in spite of the fact that for years he has been consistently overworked, he never gets behind and everything that he does is a craftsman's job. This overwork is sometimes a nightmare. You must remember that we are trying to do the impossible all the time; trying to rebuild and put in order and maintain what has been



AS I DREW IT

FRONT VIEW



AS IT LOOKED BUILT



SANDY HODGE

## CUDDIES TO CONCRETE

done and, at the same time, do the normal farm-repair jobs, when actually we only have the staff and the time to do the repair jobs; thus it is only possible to progress with supermen working very hard.

Next to Dave's shop came Bert. Bert Moodie is a blacksmith; Bert's father and grandfather were blacksmiths; Bert has five brothers, I'll give you one guess as to what they are—blacksmiths! Thus you or I are not likely to tell Bert anything about blacksmithing. Bert was always on the run; his shop looked like a scene from *The Valkyrie*; sparks, smoke, and flames rushed up from the electrically driven forge; the lathe turned off spirals of metal, whilst the noise of the grinder came in as a contrast to the general symphony. Amongst all this Bert moved with extreme agility. A ploughman would bring in a complicated machine, smashed against a gate post:

'Is it doon the den wi' it, Bert?' he would ask, a defeatist expression arising from the manner in which Scotch farmers often discard machinery, too difficult to mend, into the nearest beauty spot of no agricultural value; but Bert was not a defeatist—with his brass rule (on which I could not read a figure)—he measured to sixty-fourths with a micrometer accuracy. He would ask how long it would take to get a part.

'Too long, I'll mak it m'sele,' and it was made.

Bert came to us with complete suddenness; he had, therefore, something a little unearthly about him. We were desperate for a blacksmith—ours had been called up—and skilled engineers were hard to come by. Suddenly Bert appeared. Now Bert is no ordinary man. I said to him:

'We want an automatic weigher to measure the grain going into the silos.'

Bert finished welding the bit of metal he had been working on; he then produced a piece of chalk and started drawing on the floor, occasionally rubbing out with his foot; when satisfied that his design would work, he made it—just like that; there were no alterations, the machine was put in place and has worked without trouble ever since. It weighs to the nearest ounce; it works entirely by the gravity of the falling grain and is easily transported; it is, in fact, exactly what I asked him to make, nor would I have it made any other way; nor does it seem likely that it will ever give any trouble that could not be cured in a few minutes by an unskilled man.



## SPRING CLEANING

Somewhere about Bert's shop there was a set of bending rolls which I bought once and which were rather expensive; Bert would have nothing to do with them:

'I bend better by hand,' he told me.

I said, 'Really!'—but the fact was he did.

Bert left just as suddenly as he came. At no time, during the years he was with us, would he allow anybody to touch his tools or, in fact, anything that was his. One Monday morning he walked into the office:

'Somebody', he said, 'has touched my forge fire.'

A few minutes later he had rolled up his leather apron, packed his tools in a paper parcel, and was gone.

We have not seen him again.

Bert was a great artist at his job and he had the attributes of artists, including temperament. I do not, however, remember anyone coming or going with the suddenness with which Bert came and went. I am still not sure that he was, really, quite of this world.

If you look at the stable-yard photograph you will see the joiner's shop on the left, at the bottom, the smithy on the right, and to the right again you will see a number of concrete tiles. These tiles are of some importance in my plan, so we will go through the door into what was once the donkeys' stable. A succession of 'cuddies', as they are called in Scotland, stretched all through my childhood. Donkeys are long livers; three—Dustyfoot, Peter, and Jean—lasted from my boyhood to the time when the donkey gave way to mechanization. I tried to ride them all in turn without a great deal of success; it wasn't until years later I found that in countries where the donkey is understood they are ridden side-saddle, not astride.

The donkey's purpose in life was to go a mile to the station every day with parcels or letters and to collect the in-coming mail, etc. For this purpose a light float was used, but there was also a donkey-cart for garden work. In this I endeavoured to collect vegetables for the Fleet during the winter holidays of 1914. Now a donkey is a mountain animal and, like the elephant, never forgets; he has to remember his mountain tracks or he would not continue to be a donkey. It was a piece of natural history I overlooked on the vegetable round. The donkey—Peter it was—would go to the station, for he knew the way; once or twice (when the boy stayed in the kitchen too long) he

## CUDDIES TO CONCRETE

even went by himself, collected the parcels and returned; he would also take leaves to the compost-heap at the bottom of the garden but would undertake no other journeys. I had no success with a carrot held in front of Peter's nose after he understood the ruse; he blackmailed me out of a large proportion of the Fleet's vegetables, until I tried other methods. I remember well a car stopping on the main road, the driver stepping out of his Panhard Levasor and shouting at me:

'You horrid little boy, stop beating the donkey.'

'All right, sir,' I said, 'you get him to go up to that house where the potatoes are; I can't carry three hundredweight.'

He came over and I left him to it.

At the end of a quarter of an hour I told him:

I don't think, sir, you should beat the donkey that way. If you will give me a hand and the donkey waits we will carry the potatoes down to him.'

On the way to the house the subdued animal lover said:

'When they put their ears back like that they don't seem to be amenable to reason.'

But the donkey did not wait for us; we had just got the potato sacks out of the shed and he was off!

When, therefore, I go into the old donkey stable it is filled, in my mind, with pleasant memories of Dustyfoot and Jean (who, incidentally, loved cigarette-ends) and rather unpleasant ones of Peter.

I tell you, in another chapter, of a firewood machine I bought at Viborg, at the same time I purchased a contraption for making concrete tiles. It is a very simple affair on which you put a metal plate, some cement mortar, polish it off with a simple template, depress a pedal with your foot; and there you are!

The tiles are placed on drying racks and after about a week, depending on the weather, come apart from the metal plates and are stacked outside for further curing. I knew the moment I saw the machine it was what I wanted for my plan. Roofing has always been a considerable trouble. We do not 'grow' slates anywhere near; they are expensive and take a lot of trouble to put up; repairing an old slate roof is, moreover, a costly and disheartening job; the old slates cut down from imperials to ladies before they are fit to put on again. Moreover, on old roofs like ours the slates were hung before the idea of galvanizing nails had got around and so they constantly shower off. Our tiles, how-

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ever, are hung up by concrete bulges which last as long as the tile, presumably indefinitely as concrete improves with age; roofing with them is simple. For farm buildings they can be hung on a roof formed of straps and on dwelling-houses on a boarded roof covered with tarred felt, kept in place by wooden straps. I cannot speak too highly of these tiles. Moreover, their making fits in with the general working plan of the place for they can be constructed when it is impossible to do outside work and so the building department can carry on throughout the year.

Another simple machine makes a ridge tile but this is not so easy; at least it requires a man with some experience of the job to make properly; moreover, the output is slow.

In another part of the donkeys' stable sits a problem machine which cost a lot of money; it is greased and covered with cement bags—we do not speak of it! Filled with the idea of having a standard roof for the whole estate I thought it would be good policy to make concrete blocks and concrete lintels for doors and windows, all standard, which could be got ready in winter and drawn off from stock and used instead of bricks. After a great deal of looking around I purchased the 'Combined Block and Sill Making Machine'. It certainly looked worth the price for there is plenty of it; we made massive wood pallets five feet long to go with the act and designed an overhead trolley system to carry the finished product to the drying racks (where the hay had once been shot to Jean and Dustyfoot and Peter the Tricky). We fixed up a mixing arrangement which delivered the ingredients ready for filling; bits of this equipment still linger, and the machine itself goes on, apparently, for ever. It is one of those things nobody seems anxious to acquire—the dry-mix block-making system does not seem to work very well, the blocks and lintels have thread-like cracks in them which cause trouble; eventually, after we had overcome most of the manufacturing difficulties, we found we did not really want the finished product! We discovered we could make much cheaper and more satisfactory lintels, sills, etc., with shuttering and wet mix on the spot they were to go. Again, the concrete blocks were poor substitutes for bricks; the water poured through them and they made cold, uninviting buildings. One point about the machine I have never understood is why the makers endeavoured to make the concrete look as much like stone as possible; they cast moulds to imitate hewn and unhewn stone and

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provided means for adding colouring matter to carry on the deception. It seems a criminal lack of originality that, having found a new medium to express a different motif, they must condemn their invention to produce a particularly unrealistic representation of nature and the skill of the mason, for the beauty of a stone house lies in the manner in which the craftsman has moulded his medium to his design.

I must add that, in the same unenterprising spirit, the Firms provided a shaking box to their tile maker so that the product could be given a shadowy resemblance to a pottery tile by the addition of a veneer of oxide of iron.

It is, perhaps, for this reason that the word 'prefabricated' in connection with housing makes me shiver so much. This one ill-chosen word sound to my ears like jerrybuilding and brings to my mind all those building and architectural faults I have spent a lifetime trying to avoid.

## *Elaboratorium*

**E**laborare—corrupted to Elaboratorium—corrupted to Laboratory! No wonder I used to argue that a knowledge of Latin would lead me nowhere, for Laboratory does not make sense. But Elaborare is a descriptive word, meaning 'to work out fully and completely . . . to elaborate' and that is just the intention of a laboratory—to try and discover the truth by an accurate sorting out of all the evidence. It is for this purpose we have an Estate Laboratory, it is necessary for us to know certain things accurately in order to avoid trouble and unnecessary expenditure.

We must know in what condition our milk comes from the different farms, whether it is being filtered properly, of what richness it is (sometimes we must know these particulars of individual cows); we must know the moisture content of our grain, before we put five hundred pounds' worth into a silo we must know that it will not deteriorate; we must know the purity of our seeds for we do not wish to plant our ground with weeds and we must know what proportion of seeds are likely to germinate. Again, we require from time to time to dis-

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pense medicines for our stock, to distil water for our electric fence, delivery-van batteries, etc. Furthermore, we wish to know the amount of lime to put on our fields to keep them at the optimum Ph value. All these essential things the laboratory undertakes. In addition, we experiment to find out if a process or technique can be improved or if, by changing the various factors, we can grow more food to the acre. It is necessary to carry out this research on a small scale in the laboratory to avoid making costly failures in the field.

The laboratory is below the office; one room is set apart for the purpose of routine tests; in it we have the appliances for testing milk, soil, and grain.

The milk is tested in this way. The incoming churns from the different farms are weighed in the dairy and a sediment test of the milk is made; a sample bottle is taken to the laboratory and the contents tested for butterfat by the Gerber method, and for bacterial count by the Reasurian system, as routine, but we combine this with the methylene blue test and occasional plate counts.

These tests are only indicative, not absolutely accurate, for the small sample is drawn from such a large bulk; in the case of the plate count only a few cubic centimetres of the small sample are incubated but—over a period of time—the tests give a good idea of the cleanliness and quality of the different farms and herds; they also provide a safety-valve, for a very high count would act as a danger signal and we could go into the matter at once.

In the routine room we test grain for its moisture content. We have here, also, the necessary indicators and dies for ascertaining the Ph values—used principally in finding out the acidity or otherwise of different fields and in neutralizing laboratory solutions.

The second room is used for various operations; the dispensing of medicines for stock and experimenting with pure culture mushroom spawn and soil bacteria, for I have the notion of eventually inoculating our dung with nitrogen-fixing bacteria before placing it on the fields.

I have also experimented for many years with the growing of seedlings under controlled conditions because I believe a great agricultural future lies in devising a system whereby seedlings could be raised and transplanted under much less haphazard methods than are used at the moment; there has always seemed to me something barbarously crude about sowing hundredweights of seed of which probably less than a

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dram will be required for the final plant stand. I believe we should be able to sift through our seed mechanically so that only the best and largest seeds would be selected from a large bulk grown under controlled conditions and would be finally planted out mechanically. I have reached the stage in my experiments of having reduced various ideas to one possible method which shows signs of working under commercial conditions.

Anyone interested in this subject and welcoming a tip may like to know that for three years I worked on what proved to be a useless plan. I made a special die with which I stamped celluloid (cine film), the stamped celluloid came out in such a shape that when two films were placed together the depressions would hold a golf tee—that is, they were shaped like little cups with a small tube at the bottom. The ordinary Maltese Cross mechanism of a film-projector pulls the film forward intermittently, one frame at a time; it was thus possible to build a machine from scrap projectors, which drew the combined film from two spools intermittently, at the same time registering the two halves of the mould. Thus the embossed cups were complete. It was, by this intermittent motion, fairly easy to arrange appliances which first shook a little sterile peat-dust into the bottom of the cup, then a seed, then a little more peat-dust to cover. Finally, the double celluloid band was spooled off on a special reel. I cannot say that my home-made model looked tidy, but it worked sufficiently well for me to carry on experiments and to show the idea was possible. The next step was to arrange for a series of baths in which the spools of seed could be germinated; this did not present any great difficulty. The idea may now be gathered. The bulk seed would be poured into a hopper and the sifted peat into another, two embossed films threaded up, a small motor switched on; the seeds would be gradually sifted from the hopper so that only the plumpest were retained and these would be dropped singly into the cups of the intermittently moving film. The spools would then be passed through a series of controlled baths of nutrient solutions until they germinated and were of a suitable size for transplanting—finally the spools would be threaded on a special machine which would go across the field planting the seedlings automatically from the unwinding bands.

I never got as far as trying to construct the planting-out machine for, I found two bad snags before that.

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The roots which grew out of the bottom of the celluloid spools entwined themselves so that they would not untwine without doing serious damage to the seedlings or pulling them right out of the cups. This, I thought, could be overcome by making the bands much wider so that the necessary length of root could be accommodated, but I did not have to try that for I could not get field results from the water and nutrient cultured seedlings—I got them to grow all right but they would not grow the way I wished. The business parts of sugar-beet and mangolds are their roots—mine would make all the leaves anyone could desire but miserable roots. In three years of trial I never grew one of these plants with a respectable root; the brassica family were responsive but it is no use going on with an invention for sowing out field crops when some of the most important species are failures. I tried every way I could think of to produce results; I used the ordinary chemical substances, such as 'Indole' and Vitamin B, which are supposed to promote roots and make cuttings strike quickly, without result; I tested endless ideas of my own and finally came to the conclusion that I was barking up the wrong tree. I knew I would always be going back to the idea if I left my invention about; so I put temptation out of reach by smashing the whole thing up!

My new theory is that there must be some relationship between roots and the soil itself, perhaps a microscopic fungoid growth or necessary bacteria, and so my next effort will be based on growing the seedlings in little cartridges of actual soil. I have worked out the procedure and started on the first batch of experiments and I believe it may succeed.

I could go on telling you of these ideas and experiments but they are leading us off the main story—however, a story of one of my inventions, although not concerning agriculture, may amuse you.

I conceived the idea of producing a stereoscopic photograph in natural colours by a method different from any (to my knowledge) previously produced. There was little commercial point in the idea for, if successful, it would be practically a life's work to produce one picture! So, for a long time, I put it out of my head. One day I stopped in the street outside a magnificent optician's window (the sort of Rolls-Royce of the optical business) a crazy notion occurred to me—I would tell them about my idea and see if they would co-operate with me in making a trial plate. (The idea is so complicated it would bore you to hear it and I doubt my ability even to explain it intelligibly in writing.)

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I went into the shop and, starting with an assistant, worked my way to one of the directors; up to this time, of course, everyone had thought me mad, but the director heard me out and understood the idea. (I am sure he curses the day I went in there.) He became enthusiastic, got out his drawing-board, and we drew and sketched together for a long time. He was completely charming to me and made some very elaborate lenses for which he flatly refused to accept any payment. My next effort was to employ a well-known professor to vet the theory and he found it workable. The best I got from all this thought and expenditure was the hazy portrait of a china dog (I knew it was a china dog for I had taken the photograph, but I do not think anyone else did), but this proved my idea would work. The amusing part of the story is that it led nowhere. If we had managed to produce my idea commercially it would have been completely unprofitable—probably equally good results could be got by making ordinary stereoscopic pictures in Kodachrome; in any case the fashion for viewing stereo pictures has been dead for many a day. The pathetic end to the story is that such is my nature I still have a hankering to go back and have another shot at my useless invention.

Our laboratory is adapted from the old dairy, which I shall describe later in the chapter on cows. This building was carefully erected towards the end of the thirties of the last century—a period of particularly intelligent building.

The old dairy finished up in the last war; I came home on leave to find it gone; Victoria had carried on as dairymaid until she went off to marine engineering; Frances had taken her place, but during the last struggles of the war she had had more and more to do on the place until she had to cut the dairy out—the stone shelves and blue tiles were covered with dust, things got pushed into the egg room, the churning room became a depository for bits of bicycles and old boxes! The war had given the final blow to Megginch—as it did to so many other waning county families.

My father had reached the age when he could not think of climbing the hill any more; he had developed cataract but would not admit that he was blind. He had no faith in *post bellum* Britain and he took the only possible course of going back and living in the past—in the better days when one could fish in a thousand unpolluted rivers and income-tax was never much more than a shilling.



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The evil days had come, the shadows drew nigh—the dairy was filled with junk while cooing pigeons dislodged slates from the stable-yard roof, the wash-house sinks furred up with slime, and the poles fell down in the drying green amongst the sorrel and rank grass and lay where they fell.

I can hear my father talking to me so clearly, he might be in the room as I write:

‘I am afraid, John, you will never be able to pull it together again—you will have to give in like the rest.’

The smell of a good cigar lingers on, with very kindly thoughts about a gallant old gentleman of whom I was terrified.

## *Keyhole Kate*

**A**nother early addition to the Estate Centre was the Sawmill, and here I will introduce you to George, Scott Cowper, and Keyhole Kate.

Kate is a comparatively new member of the family; she happened this wise. I went to a sale of contractor’s plant to try to buy some wire rope and the bunching attachment of a threshing mill. Before leaving home I found out the new prices for this equipment because I have known bidding at sales to become exceedingly colourful and there is a ‘taste in the mouth’ feeling after paying more for second-hand equipment than it costs new. However, the wire rope was obtainable at a fairly reasonable figure; the buncher opened a few points below new price and then soared higher and higher (this was before the days of price control); I got out of the ring quickly lest I should sneeze and send the bidding up another fiver! The mill came next and, from the outskirts of the throng, I heard the price roar up to astronomical figures. The next lot was the traction engine which drove the mill; I gathered in once more—there is a fascination in watching big bidding and, I argued, if the prices held, this large and elaborate-looking machine would top the bill. The owner started her and she appeared to work in a hearty and purposeful manner.

## KEYHOLE KATE

'Who will open at two hundred?' the auctioneer inquired. No one it seemed, would open at two hundred—or at a hundred and fifty or even one hundred. I had another look at her; she seemed sound and hardy enough, in fact, rugged in appearance; there was, perhaps, a suggestion of the 'Rocket' about her, and I looked to see if her funnel was serrated round the top—a feature of the early engines of last century.

'Come on now, a hundred,' the auctioneer tempted, 'fully insured and passed at last test, with road licence; been working till a week ago'; but nobody seemed inclined to venture a century or, for the matter of that, seventy-five or even fifty.

I saw Sandy Stewart standing by; now Sandy is a scrap merchant and a good friend of mine; he attends all farm sales and is particularly pleasant to deal with.

'What about the scrap price?' I whispered.

'Not more than twenty. What do you want of it? Going to pull neeps (turnips) out?' Sandy suggested.

The auctioneer looked at us—pained!

'Come on, gentlemen, who will give me forty?'

'I am on for forty,' I told him.

My bid was greeted in silence and I saw inquiring glances in my direction. I had the feeling of a man who has, suddenly out of the blue, bid forty guineas for a horse everyone else knows is gone in the wind, has a bog spavin, won't lie in his stall, and is too savage to harness.

'All right, it's yours for forty,' the auctioneer informed me.

'Now, gentlemen, lot seventy-one.'

'You have a grand engine,' the owner told me 'and cheap at the price.'

'Do you think it will catch rats?' somebody asked, while Sandy suggested:

'You could mow the lawn with it, anyway.' And there it was!

When I got home George Ogston asked:

'Did you get the rope?'

'As a matter of fact I bought a traction engine as well.'

George looked at me for a second, then smiled.

'I thought you said you had bought a traction engine,' he laughed, so I laughed also.

When Scott Cowper saw her, he looked her over carefully without

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passing a remark, then wrote Dangerous Dan in chalk on the front: later he altered the name to Keyhole Kate, and as Kate she has since been known.

Kate was one of those amazingly lucky shots that usually come at the end of a bad run; she has never had a day's sickness, she puffs and blows but she saws through large oak logs; she will work happily on a diet of slabs and odd bits of wettish timber; she leaves the sawmill and uses her wire rope and great strength to haul out roots, even to pull down whole trees. We have plans to put a roller on her for road-making after the war. There is something refreshing about her construction in comparison with modern machines, for every part of her is built to do ten times the work anyone would ever ask her to attempt; she drives a threshing-mill with a velvet touch, giving it extra power whenever that is required. I think everybody likes Kate! She has, however, one peculiarity. When driven on the road her steering is like nothing I have ever seen; the wheel is turned for a number of revolutions and nothing at all happens; when one has decided that nothing is going to happen, Kate jinks to the right or to the left with the speed of a greyhound on a twisting hare; but George has mastered even this trait and can move her into apparently inaccessible positions.

But, of course, the sweetest honey collects its flies—Kate cost forty pounds but the belt which it was necessary to buy to drive the mill cost thirty-eight!

The sawmill itself consists of a travelling table and circular saw. Adjacent, in another compartment, is an historical machine known as 'Yon Splitter'. Yon Splitter came into the family this wise:

I was at the Agricultural Show at Viborg (Finland), near the Russian frontier. In the implement section were a number of low-priced machines, especially adapted for peasant farming. Yon Splitter was amongst the collection. It consisted of a circular saw with a hinged frame, upon which rested the logs; these were pushed forward and cut by the blade; at one side a massive crank drove a wedge slowly up and down. A second operator sat beside this wedge and split the sawn logs to kindling. The whole thing looked like a cosy family job and as simple a method of providing domestic firewood as one could desire. I thought the method of sale original. The various metal parts were packed in a case (complete with blue-print), corresponding in size to a cabin trunk, and one fitted it up with one's own wood. The price—six

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or seven pounds—also seemed reasonable. Yon Splitter is over thirteen years old but it works as sweetly as it did on its birthday; any member of my family can switch it on and split up a barrowful of kindling in a remarkable short space of time, nor have accidents been unduly serious, although an occasional knotty pine stick has drawn blood from most of us.

The aim of the timber department is based on Scandinavian technique, the idea being to reach a stage of forestry when the estate is entirely self-supported by a stream of timber coming in of a size and age suitable for easy conversion. Ultimately we hope to avoid the ultra-heavy log which is so costly to transport and cut. Fortunately, however, it will be many years before our supply of large logs is finished, by which time the patches of young trees, planted annually, will be ready to translate into boarding, fencing, etc. The woodlands on the property consist only of a few strips, which are useful in that they break the sometimes hurricane-like winds of the district but are too small to be of any commercial importance; however, if we can maintain the estate with its own timber supplies and can plant to continue to do so, it adds to the economic significance of our venture.

It would be rather misleading to talk of forestry in connection with our small acreage but I have made a plan for its continuous afforestation.

While we have exterminated rabbits several times, there still are rabbits—not droves running into copse or pasture or anything like that, but the odd rabbit which remains unnoticed until one finds sugar-beet being eaten or young trees badly tooth-marked. I take it as inevitable that there will always be a rabbit or hare or so around and, therefore, favour any tree which will seed itself and mature against them. Of these we have three: ash, sycamore, and of course, birch; thus, when a section of one of the small strips is partially felled, I give it a chance to see what will volunteer for a crop before replanting with the timber required to maintain a balance for the future. When I say partially cleared, I mean that if there is promising hardwood amongst ripe soft wood, we endeavour to leave the hardwood to mature through another crop of soft wood. Another aim is to leave in, or plant in, a scattered amount of beech amongst the strips, not because beech is a particularly useful wood to us but because of its fertility-giving qualities; no tree leaves the soil richer than beech.

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With regard to cutting, the aim is to leave the fallen logs parked in the woods seasoning and then, in suitable weather, cart them to the skids outside the saw and pile them up so that a supply is always there to be converted in bad weather or at odd moments. The converted timber is stacked, for further seasoning, in the timber-yard and drawn off by the joiner as required. The joiner and I plan beforehand so that the logs are cut of a size suitable for future jobs.

So much for the forestry plan which seemed reasonable and practical enough, but it sometimes seems impossible to work anything to plan in this country.

For five years before the war I nursed the home-grown timber by buying foreign, so that my rotational plan to bring on the young trees would eventually work smoothly and we would not be left with a hiatus of very young timber; it took a certain amount of self-restraint to keep the sawmill on quarter-time and wait for the programme to get into line. There is a saying to the effect that 'a watched pot never boils', but nothing is more aggravating than timber if you want it to grow quickly. However, we waited patiently and were rewarded by being self-supporting in 1938. I need hardly tell you the rest of the story; but wars must be fought and one result is that our little timber policy is smashed!

I shall, however, try once more to start it up again when control is removed.

## *Bricks without Straw*

I would like to tell you something of our Building Department, for it is owing to the skill of the men employed there that the bulk of reclamation has been made.

Joe Stewart is a mason of considerable ability; he knows his trade all the way through and never makes a mistake; it is this certainty of deliberate action which gets a job on faster than all the rush and overtime. To watch Joe building a wall is a treat for anybody who likes to see a job well done. There's no hurry but every brick is placed on its

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squashy bed of mortar in the correct position; I cannot remember Joe ever having to move a brick after putting it in place, or having to alter one piece of finished work.

Sandy Alexander is mason's labourer. He drove the carriage up to get the doctor when I was born, so he has been around the place some time. Sandy never gets fussed or hurried—he knows exactly how many bricks to lift and how much mortar to mix to keep Joe going steadily forward, and—more important still—he knows exactly how to lift bricks and how to mix mortar.

Years ago, when I was more scientific than I am now, I decided we should have a 'slump test' for concrete and mortar, to see that we were getting our mixes of the right consistency. For the slump test a conical funnel is used, into this a sample of the batch under test is rammed, with a definite number of strokes; the funnel is then inverted and the contents dumped—in the same way a child makes sand-castles, with a brightly coloured bucket and wooden spade. One then takes a ruler, measures, and finds out how much the castle has slumped; the amount of slump tells whether the mix is of the right consistency for the job in hand. After a number of tests—which were greeted with interested smiles—I found that Sandy always mixed the ingredients correctly for the job in hand by instinct, skill, and a thorough knowledge of his work; so the funnel hangs, unused, in the masons' shed.

It is not often, either, that the dumpy level comes out—for Joe can measure off and level a piece of ground correctly and in less time than it would take to read off and work out levels. Pipe in mouth, he will knock in and level off a few pegs, direct, with his thumb, where the hard-core should be dumped, shovel off a bit here, add a bit there and, to one's amazement, the job is done so accurately that one could roll a No. 8 shot to the exact spot where the slope was intended to slope, or stand an egg on the part meant to be level!

In my capacity of architect and clerk of works, however, I do run the level over a job before Joe and Sandy arrive on the scene, just to be sure that we are not attempting the impossible. Years ago I bought a handy set of drawing instruments, and very good instruments they are in spite of the 'Made in Germany' stamped on the case. My setsquare is home-made. I have also a celluloid thing for taking angles—I am not sure of its name because it is movable, while the inkstained edge-broken protractors we used at school were fixed. With this collection

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of instruments I draw the necessary plans for our buildings; the results might make Christopher Wren writhe in Saint Paul's, but the buildings have not collapsed nor have I left out a single staircase!

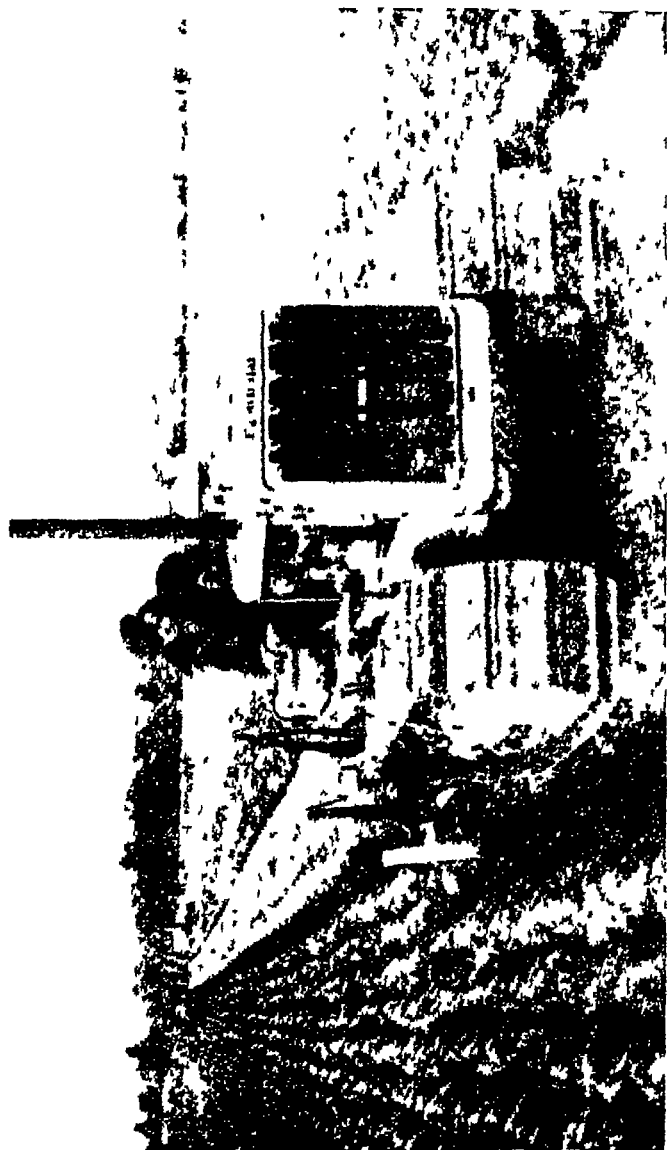
It is a peculiar side to my character that, with no natural ability to do anything, I have forced myself to learn numerous trades rather badly.

As a boy I wanted to juggle with four tennis balls; for hours, days—I am not sure that it did not run into years—I practised until I could shower the balls, criss-cross, catch one behind my back and get the lot into a top-hat. It was an agonizing performance for anybody to watch. My tongue kept sticking out of a corner of my mouth, at times my mouth moved as I counted in a whisper, occasionally I put on a forced smile. The reluctant audience were as relieved as I was when it was all over, but I learnt to do what I wanted so that I could go through my whole routine without a drop; even although no one else did, I derived a certain amount of satisfaction from the accomplishment. My mother remarked sadly: 'John, with no natural ability, has taught himself to juggle.'

The same may be said for my architecture. To pass a borough surveyor I should have to accompany my plans and explain their working, but Joe, Sandy, and Dave understand them, which is all that matters.

Much against the artistic sense of Mr. de la Mare, I have been allowed to put my drawing of the new milk-bottling plant into this book, so you may see whether you can follow it or not!

As a cost accountant I am worse than as an architect, for I have never scheduled a job yet which came out at the price I estimated—it seems hardly worth while attempting this feat; my estimates are always too much or too little. It appears that, as the job is proceeding, an 'act of God' takes place which has never occurred to me as being remotely possible. The day I have the extra men on for excavating—it deluges! The men are idle and the cost goes up, for my estimate has been on the well-known lines of. 'If a man can dig a yard and a half in an hour and a half', and I have not thought of the whole indecisive morning with it just too wet to dig and just too hopeful to put the men on to something else. At other times, 'The brick and a half in a minute and a half', which Joe was estimated to lay, speeds up miraculously and the wall is built three days before it should be. Again, the cost of materials increases suddenly so much per cent. After many years of



A PLOWING MAUGH





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estimating I have sacked myself. It does not seem that—however hard I try—I shall ever acquire the art. The estimation of the final cost, however, which Corky does in the office, is depressingly accurate for we have time-sheets and a sheaf of bills from the various supply companies. When the 'hundred-pound repair' law was in operation I shivered every time we repaired anything; I felt I was on the brink of a huge fine, death or, perhaps, imprisonment for life, for what I call a 'hundred-pound job' may be a hundred and twenty-five or seventy-five!

I will tell you later (as the book unfolds) how my ancestors had building reformations similar to mine, coinciding with the various moments in history when all buildings became suddenly out-of-date, owing to change of fashion or improvement in living standard; they had three methods of building. The oldest was to make a mixture of clay, cow-dung, and straw, into a stiffish mortar and ram this material into a wooden mould, moved around the house as the walls rose in height. The roof timbers were cut from any convenient tree by adze, whilst the roof was thatched with reeds cut from the Tay Estuary. As some of the buildings are still standing after three hundred years this could not have been as hopeless a procedure as one might suppose.

Later the clay was dug, blended with straw and dung, and baked in wood-fired kilns; the resulting bricks, although soft, have weathered well and some of them are pleasing in colour. These buildings were usually roofed with imported slates.

Intermittently with these systems houses were erected of whinstone quarried from our local hills. These houses belong to periods of extreme prosperity, for stone building has always been costly at every stage of the work. The whinstone houses are, however, the worst from the reclamation point of view. They are very expensive to alter while it seems almost impossible to keep damp from seeping through.

Of modern materials, bricks with a roof of our home-made concrete tiles are the most economical. We are fortunate in having a very good, fairly local, brick. It would pain my ancestral brick-makers, I fear, for it is made without cow-dung or straw.

## SPRING CLEANING

### *Ice Cream—Clean Milk*

One of the principal requisites of my plan was the establishment of a central dairy to process, group, and deliver supplies from the satellite farms.

I have mentioned the old dairy of my grandfather's day which came to an end during the last war, but this was constructed before the present era of streamline efficiency and belonged to the days when nobody troubled to find out if a job could be done by a quicker or more labour-saving method. I planned originally for a super dairy; however, this was not practicable in the early days when our production was small, so we used non-returnable paper cartons; little space or plant was needed—merely a convenient room and a simple form of filler and sealer. I still think non-returnable cartons are the ideal for which we should aim in milk distribution but the glass bottle is more economical; the carton would have to be universally adopted and the price for packeted milk raised to correspond with the increased cost before the carton system could become possible. At the moment there are so many factors likely to prevent this dream that I decided to design a building for bottling which could be altered round for cartoning should millennium conditions make this possible.

At last our production made it economic to put in a plant capable of *dealing with the final target, and in the meantime be profitable with the present output.*

The designing of such a plant was extremely anxious work for I knew it was a keystone of my plan which would suffer greatly if the plant were wrongly constructed, or inadequately equipped to deal with the final milk target. Many factors had to be taken into account when planning this ideal dairy. It must be central (in order to keep cartage distances within reasonable limits), have a supply of good quality pure water, ample power, and be designed to run economically.

Milk is a 365-day job.

Milk crates have to be moved from the van to the washing department, to the sterilizer, to the bottling-machine, to the refrigerator, and back to the van. Suppose each crate has to be carried nine yards—it means that labour in our plant has to be employed to carry crates

## ICE CREAM—CLEAN MILK

365 miles a year. Again, a milk plant needs to be as rugged as a battleship; there must be no fussy gadgets to break down, for milk distribution means working against time, against the minute-by-minute deterioration of a vital and perishable product. The show must go on! In the safety of dry-dock innumerable clever and ingenious devices, such as electric signals, can be installed in a warship, but an unlucky splinter of shrapnel may put the whole installation out of gear, making it essential to revert instantly to shouting. It is the same with a dairy. The timing gear of the bottling machine may sheer or the power cease, a water-main burst, or any one of a hundred different things happen which in a normal business would merely mean holding up operations for an hour or two, but the milk distribution cannot be held up; somehow the milk has to be got to the doorsteps every morning and so—in designing a plant of this nature—one must be prepared for everything to go wrong and still make it feasible to carry on.

In my opinion it is very important to avoid as far as possible bringing the milk into contact with foreign sources. The fewer machines, pipes, or vats contacted the better, and for this reason I think the ideal is to choose a site where milk can be dumped into a vat from whence it will flow by gravity through the plant. Had not the war and the necessity for doing every job with the minimum of labour prevented my doing so I think I could have created such a site; but the amount of earth to be removed, the length of new road to be made, and the distance for electric cable and water main put the idea out of the realms of wartime possibility and I had to compromise by using a milk pump to elevate the milk to the cooler, keeping the piping as short as possible.

We arranged the place in this way:

In front there is a concrete parking-place for the vans which are backed up on to a platform erected at van height for loading and unloading. Unfortunately at the moment this is not of much service as the doors of the vans open outwards and consequently it is impossible to back the vans right up to the loading deck and then open the doors, but with the type of van I plan to use later it will be possible to do so.

From the van the crates of dirty bottles are placed in a soaking trough, the idea being to loosen some of the dirt; they are next placed in the conveyor of the rinsing machine and traverse the various washing jets automatically until they arrive at the outlet end where they are examined, the bottles which are satisfactorily cleaned being put in

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crates and the unsatisfactory bottles being plunged into another soaking trough, preparatory to brush-washing before sterilizing. I do not think it possible to simplify this part of the procedure as if it were made any more automatic it would increase the chance of allowing unclean bottles through. The clean bottles are stacked in their crates on low platforms on which they can be moved by running under a hydraulic lift truck, raising it to take the load, and pushing the bottles around the plant as desired. The full crates are trucked into a long narrow sterilizing room where the bottles are steamed for half an hour. An exhaust fan is next turned on to draw off the steam while the room is heated with steam pipes so that the bottles are completely dried out.

A bottle washed in really hot solutions, steamed, and dried becomes remarkably clear—a tip I have learned on the nights I have been forced to wash-up after meals and one I suppose every housewife has known instinctively from birth. The ideal I aim at with milk bottles is to be able to hold one up against the light and for an observer to see nothing except my hand!

The next day the platforms are lifted and transferred from the sterilizing to the cooling room, which is connected with the bottling room (our pride, for the walls are covered with glass tiles and the ceiling with glazed cement panels).

The bottling machine is of the type known as a rotary filler and is provided with a bottle conveyor belt. It is only necessary to tip a crate of bottles on to the conveyor and the machine does the rest. After filling, the bottles are automatically moved round the capping device, which inserts into the neck of the bottle the well-known cardboard disc which the customer finds so hard to remove.

In my opinion this is not an ideal way of sealing the bottle as dust can collect in the hollow, but a crown cork—the type placed on beer bottles—has two disadvantages:

(1) It is expensive—our milk, although tuberculin-tested, is not sold at 'certified' prices so that we could hardly compete with the extra cost of crown capping.

(2) Bottles used for crown capping, owing to the narrow necks, are very hard to brush clean so the slight advantage of the better cap is cancelled by the greater risk of dirty bottles.

From the capper the bottles are placed in crates and restacked on a

## ICE CREAM—CLEAN MILK

platform which is lifted and wheeled into a refrigerator of a size corresponding with the sterilizing and cooling rooms.

The churns of milk arriving from the different farms have already been cooled and, after a sample has been taken, are put into the refrigerator until the laboratory pronounces the contents ready for bottling.

Grace does the laboratory tests which are routine but need someone conscientious like Grace, who can stick impartially to the tests without cutting corners. Grace was forewoman in a knitting factory; when her call came she chose the land and is our most efficient land girl. She runs the dairy and even our Sanitary Inspector agrees it could not be run better.

The card for the different farms is made out as follows:

Temperature on arrival;

Reasurian test (which gives an indication of the milk's bacterial quality in so many stages);

A sediment test which is again scored in quality; and finally,

A butterfat test.

The testing of the milk involves holding it a little longer than we did before we had a laboratory, but I think it is better so, as it shows up any trouble.

The different farms are by these means able to get a score-card at the end of the week showing how things are going, but should there appear to be anything wrong we can communicate with the farm concerned by telephone (which is in the office above the laboratory) and find out what the trouble is.

In addition to the Reasurian test we have a second line of defence in that we can plate out colonies and get a plating count—a method prescribed for the official testing of milk in Scotland. We can also have a check on individual cows. In theory we should therefore be able to put a finger on any trouble and remedy it.

Years ago we erred on the side of cooling the milk too much—while this stops bacteria breeding it spoils the cream line and when the customer allows the milk to stand for a period in a warm place it 'goes off' more quickly than milk which has been cooled less rapidly. We aim now at getting the milk down to forty degrees Fahrenheit and keeping it there. In order to do this the milk is cooled as milked—that is to say it goes from the teat cups of the milking machine, through a

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stainless steel pipe, over a cooler into a churn. The churn is then taken to the central dairy and put into the refrigerator. After the milk has passed the laboratory test it is poured into a vat, pumped over the cooler (fifty-fifty water and brine) and brought to a few degrees below forty degrees Fahrenheit, at which temperature it is bottled.

I should like to arrange a cooling plant on the van to prevent the temperature of the milk rising after leaving the central dairy and before being delivered to the customer and—even further ahead in my vision of perfect milk—I should like to instal a milk intake into the customer's dwelling by means of a small door into a special cold chamber handy to the kitchen. The roundsman would have a master key, open the door, put in the milk and lock the door. I doubt if this system could really be economic as the intake would cost a good deal of capital to instal and a customer might leave us shortly after installation, but I feel that if these things could be done milk would be delivered in the most ideal manner possible and—as I have told you—I am primarily an idealist.

The water problem has always been acute hereabout; an old minister I knew used to say of the district, 'Without fuel in winter, water in summer, and the Grace of God all the year round'. An observation I thought decidedly perspicacious on his part until I discovered that not only has it been used about a great many other districts but it is a well-known Polish wisecrack. However, water has been troublesome. My grandfather put in a private supply eighty years ago from a very good spring on the Sidlaw Hills, but nothing (excepting a swimming pool) uses more water than a dairy, while we have gradually put our cottages and farms on to this long-suffering spring, so it became inadequate and we have changed over to the public supply. This water is not as clear as our old spring water but the water inspector—a remarkably keen young man—assures us it is excellent. The change-over has brought us a new set of restrictions; formerly we could put water wherever we wished but now we have to fill up forms and apply for permission—procedure which takes a matter of weeks. In a life devoted to form-filling it becomes somewhat irksome.

The years alone will show whether the dairy is really ideal but we have been fortunate in having so many skilled tradesmen on the job—I do not remember ever having such luck before—the dairy really is the creation of artists.

Joe Stewart, of course, has been mentioned before. He is the mason

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of dreams and his work was carried through ahead of schedule. It sometimes happens however that various persons sent to erect special plant are nothing more than a nuisance and when they clear out leave a number of whacking mistakes behind to be discovered at leisure. Not so in this case because the engineer—Charlie—had been here when the temporary dairy plant was being fitted up, consequently everybody called him 'Charlie' from scratch and he knew the general form of the place. Charlie did everything perfectly.

The refrigerator man (I always forgot to find out his proper name) was an ardent fisherman in addition to being an expert engineer. He wished to catch a salmon during his stay in Scotland and had made a super spinning-reel for the purpose, but I had to tell him that our local river is somewhat of a sinecure and not all that fun, even when you do get a day's fishing.

First, at seasons when one has the smallest chance of catching anything, every inch is let at exorbitant figures and a man who has paid a large sum for a few days' fishing is not likely to share it with any but his nearest and dearest.

Secondly, in the early or good part of the year the affair is so ordered about that it comes more under the category of watching a billiard match than a day's fishing. On arrival at the venue two charming men meet you—the keeper and the boatman. They put your rod together with a few lightning touches and, after a painfully indulgent smile at your tackle, provide their own. Usually however they have three rods already in position in the boat and place your rod carefully in the lunch hut (there is a lunch hut). The boat is drawn up in such a manner that you can get in without wetting your feet and in a second they are pulling away against the current. Your first big thrill is the moment you are allowed to put your line out and this is controlled by a white thread which shows you the exact amount to let out; after the lines are out there is nothing more to do but just sit still. One feels awkward about carrying on a conversation with the boatmen who are engaged in a life-and-death struggle rowing the boat against the current; some people, I understand, read a newspaper. In the event of a fish being hooked the boat is manipulated in such a very definite and skilful manner that one has nothing more to do than hold one's rod up and wind in the line as permitted by the fish until finally—at the right moment—the keeper deftly gaffs the salmon, removes and rebaits the line, and one is off again.



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By good chance a very kind friend offered us a day's fishing and not only that but said we could fish in any way we liked. However, one thing and another happened to prevent our going but we consoled ourselves with the thought that nobody seemed to be catching anything anywhere—it was maddening afterwards to find that two good salmon were caught on the beat the day we should have been there.

It seems a long way from dairying to salmon fishing although the dairy looks similar to a salmon river for all the water runs down the floors and over the loading platform at the front of the building, into an open channel which conducts it to a grid-covered drain at a distance from the building. It is, I think, the safest plan to have no drains anywhere near a dairy for a choked pipe could be a wonderful hatchery for every kind of bacteria.

For the foundations of the glass tiles we had a Scots plasterer who had worked in London for many years until a bomb disturbed his house—a clever craftsman. He had just finished a complicated piece of work when the apprentice dropped a hod of plaster on it—in picking up the hod he knocked a bit more down with his foot; the plasterer showed incredible restraint, merely remarking: 'I'd say something if I didna ken you were daft.'

The beginning of any business is fraught with troubles—I have learned, by years of bitter experience, to expect nothing to go right at first.

Years ago a friend of mine started a canning factory and asked me to go over to see it. Of course I would not have gone had I known it was a *première*, I thought it had been running long enough to iron out the worst troubles. I felt terribly sorry for my friend and very embarrassed to have to witness such an ordeal, for one of the key machines—the one that lids and seals the fruit—went wrong and showered syrup and crushed tins around the factory with considerable force. While this machine was being adjusted the conveyors became jammed with unsealed tins; it seemed that every wasp's nest in the district was situated near the factory as clouds of these insects zoomed around the streams of syrup. In another part of the factory the girls had organized a strike while even the wasps did not like the clouds of steam escaping from the piping.

Our *première* was not so bad; I had hoped to conduct it in secret but

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quite a number of people appeared from seemingly nowhere. The bottling plant resented being moved and behaved in a similar manner to the can capper, occasionally throwing a milk bottle into the group of spectators; however we got this right quicker than I expected and there were no wasps!

We have provided for building on and installing our ice-cream plant again when the sale of this commodity is once more possible. It seems to be the ideal way of using up the summer surplus and I plan my final milk round to be limited to the winter production. Before the war we had built up quite good connections for our summer ice cream; we called it 'Polar Bear'.

There seems no need for a producer-retailer to make the usual type of milk ice 'cream' supplied in this country. One can make a first-class real cream ice and get the same price for it as one would for the same quantity of retail milk, making allowances for ingredients, plant, labour, and other costs. Our ices were highly spoken of, I think rightly so, for we made a standard all-cream ice with cane sugar for sweetening, a little gelatine for binding, and the best vanilla we could get for flavouring. There was, in those days, no standard for ice cream as there is in America, and this I think is a mistake not only from the public's point of view in that they pay the same price for low butterfat ice cream as for first-grade product, but also from the producer's point of view. A milky ice freezes one up, makes one's head turn round backwards and one's teeth jump a couple of inches because it has little food value, while a high-grade cream ice is always palatable and never too cold. Sales can consequently be built up for the many summer days we have in this country when the sun does not appear; but the poor ice kills these sales.

There is, however, still a problem to be solved and that is how to get ice cream direct to the customer, so that he can buy it in the same way as milk.

We tried various ways with thermos containers and dry ice, but have yet to discover a method which is not wildly uneconomic and by which the cream will keep well. This is a nut we shall have to crack for a very convenient sale could be built up.

We have never planned to make butter for sale although before rationing we used to make a little for ourselves, but we stopped doing this feeling it would not be fair to use one's opportunities as a farmer to

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live on the (butter) fat of the land. It is a pity that butter-making should be unprofitable. I have worked it out in every way and conclude that it must mean one thing—butter-making countries have to put up with a lower standard of living than other countries. There seems to be no valid reason for this or why the price should not be raised to become generally economical. One hopes that after the war there will be a general adjustment of wages and prices so that all essential foodstuffs can be produced profitably and the public have a sufficient purchasing power to be able to live on and pay a proper price for nutritious foods.

I am very much opposed to pasteurization of milk. In the usual 'fear nothing' manner of the Drummonds, I have made no provision for installing such a plant in our expensive new dairy, yet I know pasteurization may become compulsory at any moment and I may be forced to adopt the process. This will mean tearing down my elaborate ceilings and glass-tiled walls and altering the whole of the equipment we have installed with such trouble. To understand why pasteurization is likely to become compulsory you must know that a great number of people, perfectly capable of thinking for themselves, prefer to buy thought ready-made, and that doctors and other professional men have great reverence for statements appearing in text-books, especially if good arguments are attached to them. I have reason to believe that a few recent text-books have influenced medical opinion a great deal. Now it is possible to argue quite clearly and quite logically and yet be wrong! For thousands of years we thought the earth was flat and covered with a meat safe painted blue inside with a certain amount of smoke drifting around; for even longer thinking men believed that the planets emitted a musical note and their reason was quite logical; they argued if you threw a stone through the air it made a whanging noise or if you shot an arrow it made a whiz; therefore as anybody going through the air made a noise the planets made a noise. We could not of course hear the noise of the planets but again they argued, very sensibly, that you may not hear the noise a pin makes when it drops while a blacksmith is shoeing—the din of the world cut out the hum of the planets.

Now if you or I write a text-book to prove some idea we believe in we discard or gloss over the bits that refuse to fit in with our theory. A book I read recently on pasteurization passes over the question of

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moulds and yeasts in one sweeping paragraph. If I knew the writer of this book and argued with him I think he would say, 'Prove you are right', and that is of course what I could not do; but my hunch is that a yeast (enzyme) is a substance very vital to our well-being; it can make the remarkable difference to dough which makes it digestible bread; it can turn starch into sugar and do many other miracles. Unfortunately we know very little about enzymes but I would say the minute doses of the many enzymes in our milk have a very important relationship to our general health and that killing them is wrong. A mould, on the other hand, sounds a nasty thing but it would seem to have its uses. A mould hatched off an Arctic form of moss, when applied to wounds, eliminates several harmful forms of germ; penicillin in fact has been described as the greatest discovery of the war. If I argued with this author on the question of vitamins I know he would say: 'It is possible that the Vitamin C content is impaired by pasteurization, but it is easily obtained from other sources.' Further pressed as to the purchase of this vitamin during winter months when green vegetables are scarce, he would say, 'Well, liver!' so that it is not much use my arguing with pasteurizers for they have more answers than I have questions. We agree however that pasteurization kills the bacteria producing tuberculosis and typhoid, also *B. abortus*, but that it does not kill the bacteria responsible for tetanus, or anthrax, or *B. Welchii*, while the temperature to which pasteurization raises milk is exactly the condition that the thermophilic group of bacteria desire to breed in (these are organisms which come from dust), so even the purists admit it is not sterilization. I realise of course that harmful organisms do find their way into milk and water supplies but the cure—in my opinion—is not to chlorinate the water or pasteurize the milk but to trace the cause and stamp it out. Pasteurization is a very delicate operation, a breakdown or slight flaw may loose an avalanche of infection on persons long deprived of the mechanism to meet this invasion. To take an example, the pasteurizing temperature is between 62.7° C. and 65.5° C. To kill *B. tuberculosis* one requires to hold milk at a temperature of 61° C. for 30 minutes. Now if a pasteurization plant is required to work only five hours a day it must in ten years work without variation for 17,250 hours; thus the scientist advocating pasteurization presupposes quite a number of things; he presupposes that the bad things killed off (whose effects are colourful and well known) outweigh the

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good things killed off (of whose existence we have only recently become aware and of whose purpose and relationship we are still vague; but—more than that—he presupposes that the human element in processing will remain constant, that the machine element will remain constant, and that a thousand chances and accidents which occur every day in every business will not occur. I think he is presupposing too much.

## Part Three

### Of the Earth Earthy

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#### *The Island of Broom*

**T**his I understand is a translation of the word *inchconans* but there is no broom on it now. The history of the farm is like that of the rest of the property. It was originally laid out in numerous smallholdings with *pise de terre* wattled and thatch-roofed houses under a somewhat varying and complicated system which never seemed to work out much better than just off starvation.

The system of cultivation in vogue in those days did not tend to make things any easier; a proportion of the land was left in fallow, not only in fallow—it was left until it reseeded itself to grass—an old text-book says that it should not be ploughed till the ‘red moss’ has made its appearance. What the ‘red moss’ was I do not know but if I saw ‘red moss’ setting in I would put every plough I possess on to put it back. ‘Red moss’ makes one think that the ground was not any too well drained; it seems actually (as far as I can find out) to have been drained with open ditches in a similar manner to that in which drainage is carried out in Scandinavian countries.

With the large drains reducing the cultivable area, the fallow waiting for the grass to seed itself (and then waiting for the ‘red moss’) only a small proportion of the land was under cultivation and that was used for growing cereals; the turnip had not yet been thought of. Thus the bulk of the stock had to be killed off before winter as there was no keep for them; with the minimum of stock available it was no wonder draught oxen were popular because after they had done their turn they would prove more edible than a horse. My ancestors considered that the only hope of improving things was to get a better price for the grain, the local price appeared wicked—though it is a little difficult to compare the two standards of living, for a pound, Scots, seems to have

## SPRING CLEANING

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gone as far as twenty-five pounds now. An early John hit upon the idea of buying a boat and shipping the grain down to the London market—my family, it will be remembered, have leanings towards boats. It proved a good speculation and the extra price made an immense difference all round.

Flax was another profitable crop. There are still traces of the steeping ponds and spinning wheels lingered on till my youth. Jean Campbell (wife of Grain Boat John), the lady who would go to conventicles, organized a spinning bee in the winter months, when she roped in all the smallholders' wives and they spun inside the old castle and did all the necessary to make linen. A sheet still lingers from these days and it is very much better made than one would have supposed. I have also preserved a spinning wheel (one of the things I have meant to mend for ages); it still looks as if it would work all right. Jean also did any doctoring needed about the place and that seems to have been a fairly steady job. The district had scourges of smallpox which wiped out a considerable number of children—Jean buried four of her own from this complaint. The habit of the 'boss's wife' attending to the sick went on for a long time; a later wife—Lady Catherine—had a very potent recipe against the plague, which I give in case you may find it handy!

'Of rue, thyme and sage, a handful; steep in an earthen pot, heat over a fire of wood, add of oak or apple ashes a handful. It must heat for a whole day. Sprinkle it on the walls and linen. Many malefactors, at the time of the Great Plague, confessed that they had managed to commit their crimes by the aid of this recipe.'

In spite of all this medicinal skill and business acumen, the starvation line was reached after a bad season; to help matters John stored some iron rations which were then eked out to prevent having to slaughter the breeding stock.

There were also cattle thieves ready to rustle a herd when they got the chance.

Apart from the feudal holdings were the common lands where the holders had complicated rights and endless troubles ensued. There were no fences and so all the family were employed herding stock. Geese too were popular.

It is rather a difficult life to understand if you have no personal experience of this sort of thing. I have lived in a Finnish peasant's

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house where they spun their own clothes and lived an almost entirely self-supporting life. Again—if I close my eyes—I can see an olive grove with a ragged Arab boy herding a few lean sheep. Our hotel had given us a wonderful picnic lunch—as only the French know how—and I gave the boy some chicken sandwiches (to think of which makes my mouth water), also the cardboard boxes the lunch was packed in and the paper napkins, knives, and forks. The lad took these gifts and then knelt on the ground and kissed my hand—a feudal action.

In the same way I can shut my eyes and see the old system at Inchconans; everybody linked together by a common bond; the chatter in unintelligible Scotch at the flax-spinning, or a ragged little girl, pit-marked by smallpox, herding half a dozen geese on the common lands. Many of the settings of the piece still stand—the spinning wheel and the faded yellow letters seem no more out-of-date than those written a few years ago. •

It is exciting to understand the past for one sees how far we have gone in a short time, how progress is rushing forward, so one hopes that we are being led on to something slightly better than just a fight to keep fed and warm.

When the new fashion of tenant-farming came in Inchconans was reorganized into three farms. The land was good and the tenants seem to have done well. During the last century a farmer of considerable skill and push tenanted Inchconans through two long leases. He took over the other two farms and made one holding of it. From all accounts he was an excellent farmer and brought the ground up to the highest pitch of production. He specialized in the potato crop and converted a great portion of it to starch in a Farara mill, for which he used the buildings at Shipriggs—one of the farms absorbed in Inchconans.

After Mr. Clark retired William Watson, a retired marine engineer, took over the farm and completed a nineteen years' lease. Mr. Watson was also an excellent farmer, but the spadework had been done for him by the old smallholders, the tenants of the three farms, and finally, by Mr. Clark's double tenancy of the whole farm—thus he had something of a flying start.

During Mr. Clark's tenancy rather an unfortunate thing happened. The farm buildings of Inchconans, which had just been remodelled and made large enough to take in the other two farms, were razed by a virulent fire; fortunately they were insured and were rebuilt better than

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before. They had just been completed when they were burned down again. The insurance company again paid up and the farm was rebuilt for the second time. Now, however, the insurance company had come to the belief that there was something either unlucky or extremely fishy about the place and they refused the risk! How right they were! The farm had hardly been rebuilt when it was burnt down for the third time. Suspicion had wavered around all the possible people in the district, for it was tolerably certain that it was the work of either a lunatic or someone who had a grudge against Mr. Clark or my grandfather. By the time of the last fire the suspicion had narrowed down to three persons who were all carefully watched. One man, a ploughman, was known to have had a disagreement with the tenant and had been heard to say, 'I'll get my own back on you'.

He lived in the cottages near the farm and so it was easy for him to choose the propitious moment—the farm was always burnt down during a spell of dry weather and when the wind was in the right direction. The second suspect was a half-wit who roamed about the countryside and was known to have incendiary tendencies. The last suspect was a railwayman. The railway passes close to the farm and it so happened that he had been on the spot at each of the fires, although no particular motive could be ascribed to him. Two of these suspects must have had a very uncomfortable time; the other—the daft boy—presumably did not care. Whoever burned the place down it had to be rebuilt and the fourth time without any insurance money.

The type of large farm-steading we have in Scotland—with covered cattle-yards, cart-sheds, granaries, stables, cow-sheds, boxes, implement sheds, and so forth—is a very expensive item; besides, I imagine the enthusiasm had gone out of the work as it was felt it would not be long before it was burnt down again. It was not surprising, therefore, that this last rebuilding was carried out in a very slipshod manner. As soon as it was finished the district stood back and waited to see the blaze but by this time the trick had been played once too often; several people claim to have discovered the arsonist but looking through the mist of time it is impossible to say which story is correct. My father said the suspected ploughman found it out. This man was particularly sore about being suspected—not unnaturally perhaps, so he waited until the weather was dry and there was a good wind blowing and then kept watch. He did not have to watch long before he found a boy

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lighting up the first stack. The ploughman was sensible enough to collect witnesses—who subsequently claimed that they had found the culprit themselves. This boy was the child of another employee on the place—one whom no one had suspected—and had been exceedingly clever in the way he planned his fires so that not even his own father or mother guessed it was he. I think he was the biggest exponent of the scorched earth policy I have heard of.

Inchconans is an amazingly unlucky farm for fires; during Peter Niven's tenancy (Peter Niven came after Watson) a large stack was burnt, and since I have farmed it the railway engine has lit up a stack of hay and—a few years later—burned nine acres of standing barley; moreover, the barley was hardly extinguished when a shed with a tractor in it was burnt down. It had of course to be a rubber-wheeled tractor and it is now impossible to replace the tyres. The shed this tractor was in was connected by pipe with the main paraffin store and if this had caught alight the whole farm would have gone but fortunately it did not.

After William Watson had farmed through a long lease and made enough money to retire on, William Niven took over but died whilst his lease was still young; two of his active sons carried on and managed to get the farm through the slump period to the slightly better days of the 'thirties; at the end of their lease I took over.

This succession of good tenants and the feudal smallholders before them had overcome the worst troubles so we have had little to do to tidy up the land, merely to remove a few isolated trees, to gyro-till some fields in which large boulders lay below the surface, and to do a certain amount of patching-in drainage and ditch cleaning. The buildings as yet have not been touched. We shall wait until the farm has its dairy herd when we aim at modernizing the buildings (my plan gives 1946 as the date for this work).

The cottages are merely patched up, that is, they have had water, sculleries, etc., added to the old buildings. To bring them up to the ideal they require rebuilding and that has had to be postponed until such things again become possible, although according to my plan they should have been done ere now.

When we took the farm over we carried on the traditional style of farming with a six-course rotation—buying beef cattle, fattening them through the winter for their dung and the chance of a profit—but this

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system has gone on long enough. Potatoes—which take a heavy pull out of the ground—come once every six years, while barley, wheat, and some of the oats have been cash crops. To my mind this has taken too much from the farm. Fertility has been maintained in the past by the increased use of artificials and this prolonged use of artificial manures has taken the bloom off the place, as it has from so many farms I have watched in the district—it is not that crops are less but that diseases are more.

For a long time preventive methods have been used on this and on similar farms to combat these diseases; dressing seed with mercuric dressing, spraying potatoes, etc., but the diseases are not lessening appreciably. There is the indescribable 'look' one sees about artificially manured crops—the 'look' one sees all over the country—I have seen it on the best Lincolnshire soils, in the Vale of Evesham, and in the cream of our Scottish farmlands. If you have a knowledge of animals you will know what I mean—sometimes the most classically bred and proportioned stock look 'off'—there is a lack of polish. It is the same with our classic soils, where tons of artificials have been used year after year; they have lost their bloom, they 'stare'—like the coat of a thoroughbred out of condition. There are crops there in quantity and the soil is obviously excellent but—somewhere—something is missing. Every year when I pay the artificials' bill for Inchconans I know I have pushed this excellent farm further down the hill—yet I cannot do otherwise. We are so tied in this vicious circle that if I withheld the bags of artificials which are gaily sprinkled over the fields I should have miserable crops—I might even have crop failures—for by years of doping the soil has been poisoned. There is nothing in it now to grow a crop unless it is boosted with artificial nitrogen; the soil is no longer a living thing capable of producing increasingly but a jaded *roué* waiting uninterestedly for a strong drink in order to keep going. This hangover form of farming, with pick-me-ups every year, must end in time in a completely pathological condition, in crops rushing up in abundance without any real vitality or staying power waiting for the ever-increasing horde of diseases to sicken them. To make the holding independent again and the rich lands strong I have to move gradually. The potato crop received ten tons of dung per acre; this year we managed more—about fourteen. In addition we do not cut our second crop of hay but plough it in—and thus we are offering a slight sop to

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the gradual rot; but this is not enough. The root shift is grown entirely by artificials and roots take a great deal out of the ground. It would, probably, never be practicable to dung the root crop as well as the potato crop, for to dung the potato crop requires cartage for a distance of 300 miles (at a rough estimate, varying according to the field employed).

My new farming idea for Inchconans has already started; it will take three years before it is in full working order and probably another three until the last bag of artificial is emptied out. The programme is to halve the potato rotation and combine it with the root rotation so that potatoes will be grown on the same ground once in twelve instead of once in six years. The potato rotation will be followed by grass. This will be very intensively grazed (by the use of electric fencing) and after the hay crop is removed the second-cutting hay will also be grazed by the dairy stock—a better arrangement than grazing with itinerant sheep who take away in flesh, bone, and wool perhaps more than they put in.

In the temporary grass shift I aim at providing the basis of the following year's root and potato crop; I plan, after cropping the pasture bare, to let the new grass grow to its most potent stage, about six inches, dung and plough it in. With the addition of pigs and poultry to the holding the only cash crop sold direct from the field will be the half-rotation of potatoes and a good proportion of these will be used for pig food. The stock will, I hope, be able to receive twenty per cent of their feed from abroad and so the ground will be accumulating wealth all the time. It will of course mean considerable financial embarrassment while the long change-over takes place—a loss which will, I know, be difficult to fill from other sources; it is moreover a loss one need not incur for (as long as the Government keep their minds on cash crop prices) it will be possible to make worthwhile money by the present system of cash crops, boosted by bag emptying. In my own mind, although few modern scientists would agree with me, I believe that if we continue with the cash-in crop system, boosted by fertilizers, we shall farm ourselves out of the best lands in this country within fifty years. And to regenerate these lands will be a very difficult thing indeed; in fact, it may not be an economical plan at all and it might prove cheaper to let them build themselves back with a natural rotation of scrub to forest. When I say this I remember that it is only a few

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years since our leading industrialists stated, as their massed opinion, that if income tax were raised to 1s. 6d. in the £1 it would be impossible to carry on industry in this country; and I remember also many other sweeping statements that have subsequently proved hopelessly wide of the mark; nor can I see how the average tenant farmer can undertake such a long and unprofitable change-over as I have proposed. Again my view is not only a minority but a very small minority one, and the bulk of scientists and the majority of agricultural officials all believe devoutly in and prescribe the use of millions of tons of artificials and poisonous sprays.

From these observations the reader will gather that I realize to the full that although I and several other people may alter our system to an all-out fertility one, our sacrifices may be of no avail because we may only be specks in a sea of disease-ridden country. The degenerating area may be so great and our spots so small that the diseases may overcome us along with the rest; but because I believe what I am doing *is* the right course for the future and because I am a wholehearted idealist, I intend to peg away although it may quite possibly break me completely.

The manager of Inchconans is Sandy Hodge. For years he managed the whole arable land of the estate, before we could put each farm on its own. I can tell you it was a job! He had over a hundred fields to think about, from near the hundred-acre mark to little odd ones of five or six. It was a disheartening job and it aged Sandy. He said to me one harvest when the rain was pouring down in a sheet and we had dotted groups of workers scattered miles apart:

'Sometimes I feel like just running away from it all.'

'Funny you should say that,' I told him; 'I feel the same; it's just more than anybody can bear. I often feel like clearing out and false-enlisting in the Navy.' So we laughed for we knew exactly how we both felt.

But we stuck on and in the end I think we shall both be glad to have done so. There's a joke every year when I ask Sandy how many harvests this makes him.

Sandy is an amazingly up-to-date man: he never thought there was anything odd about trying out combine harvesters years before any one else in the district had thought about trying them—and he made a success of the new system. He also took to baling hay straight off the

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field—which nobody else around us has ever tried—and made it work. When we sold the baler and the combines this year he was nearly in tears but one has to be reasonably business-like; in two years they will be out-of-date as numbers of new machines are being designed better suited to our conditions. Ours were expensive machines and there is a hue and cry for them at the original purchase price; a small advertisement in a farming paper brought twenty-two reply paid wires; yet in a couple of years they may be completely out-dated and of as much value as old rope. Again, members of our Local Agricultural Committee don't like them; they have always followed them round with misgivings and one has, at the moment, to be tactful; furthermore, I have a new system of harvesting which I think will be more economic and work better in our country than either combining or binding.

'Haymaking will be a different story this year,' Sandy said, and so it will be, for the pick-up baler is a systematic method of harvesting hay and baled hay is much easier to distribute from farm to farm. Sandy knows how to manage men and they all like him; a man transferred from Sandy's farm to another would not rest until he got back—and that is not a bad advertisement.

The only thing that beats Hodge is the potato squads; lorry-loads of children arrive daily and none of them are particularly keen to break their backs lifting 'tatties'. Strikes, fights, and general hell let loose is potato time. Our local kids are, of course, all right but we have not nearly enough for the job. As I say to Sandy, 'It's nearly a whole-time job looking after one's own children without having to look after other people's.'

Sandy is much happier now he is managing a single farm, and yet it is not quite single. He still has to deal with a few odd bits of ground which have not yet been fitted in. He is a top-line turn at a party with a big repertoire of comic songs, all unpublished but publishable! These are the ploughman's songs which have been passed down from generation to generation. One—'The Iron Horse'—deals with the adventures of a man going on a train for the first time and is a great favourite of mine; another one—'I Married a Wife'—is reserved for wedding parties and gives the newlyweds a good idea of what they may be in for! Luckily it is sung after the wedding or few people would get married in our district.

One of the odd men on Inchconans is described as 'Old Glen' and is



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traditional to the farm, having worked there with old Watson and, I believe, old Clark as well. He has, however, had spells in the army. I said once:

'It's hot to-day.'

'Aye,' he said. 'It reminds me of Majuba Hill'—and there and then launched into one of the most realistic descriptions of a battle I have ever heard; I could see the scarlet tunics and the new khaki, the Marines limbering up their guns and the bearded Boers cracking their rifles from the sun-bleached rocks.

Glen is not air-minded.

'Have you seen those?' I asked, thinking it might interest him to see a glider. He looked up at the lumbering old transport plane, chugging along hauling a big troop glider, then went back to shovelling potatoes, remarking disinterestedly:

'A couple of Spits.'

I pointed out that the Spitfire was (at that time) one of our fastest planes, but he was not interested and dismissed the subject:

'May be a Blenheim!'

It is generations of men like Sandy Hodge who have made Inchconans and, indeed, all our Scottish farms. They have also had a good share in making Canada and Australia—for they have something more than the incentive to earn money or just make a living—they have the desire to do a job better than it has been done before.

## *Balcallum, Oldwood and the Myres*

**T**he farms of Balcallum, Oldwood and The Myres present a considerable problem for, while the acreage is sufficient, topographical features make it difficult to improve the layout of these farms, simplify their working, and bring them to the standard size I have set for the plan.

During many years I have devised many rearrangements and have at last decided on what seems to me the best layout, taking everything into consideration. This design makes the three into two of my standard farms, each of exactly 150 acres of rotational arable—that is

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fifteen ten-acre fields. In the final plan these fields will not be fenced by permanent boundaries but merely divided off by movable electric posts and wires, the completed farms being in the nature of one field with a boundary fence serviced by one road.

In addition to the two standard-size farms there is sufficient ground over to make The Myres into a small farm to produce seed for the rest of the group. On this farm we hope to grow, amongst other seeds, pedigree strains of grass and clover; to stock it we intend keeping the cream of our herds selected for showing (if we show stock again), and animals drafted into the estate from outside.

*The danger of bringing purchased stock straight into valuable herds is too great and the same applies to animals exposed to infection at agricultural shows.*

To this model farm I hope to entice a first-class man with the power of putting bloom on the animals, knowing by instinct how to keep them fit and having the power to detect disease.

The Myres has the oldest farm building on the property; it was the first farm to adopt the landlord tenant system built by Adam. It has a thatched roof and some of the walls are stone, some brick, and others of rammed clay; the windows are arched and rather small. If there was any plan for its erection it could not have been anything more than Adam and the foreman made with a stick on the ground. I am not sure if it is condemned by the local authority or not but rather think not as it has water.

Now the strange thing about The Myres is that everybody who has lived there has been extraordinarily happy and comfortable. Willie Macdonald, who was on the place so long that he became a tradition more than a person, swore it was a grand house. I remember going to a party, I think for the wedding of one of Willie's many grandchildren, and a very good party too—with an accordion, pipes, dancing, and a bottle or so of Scotch; it struck me the same way—it was a grand house! I really could not say why. The room never got too hot, as most rooms in small houses do on such an occasion, nor too cold; it never seemed to get overcrowded and the fun was uproarious from start to finish.

Old Willie died years ago and Mrs. Macdonald too; she was a delightful person but never remembered where all her children were without prompting from one of them:

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'Is it James who's in Canada?' she would ask.

'No, Ma, James is in New South Wales'—and so it would go on.

Willie was endowed with a gift I only realized too late, otherwise I might have been a millionaire! In happier days we used to have a sixpenny Derby sweep and Willie always drew the winner. After about eight years of this I began to realize it was not a fluke but a mathematical certainty—one only had to follow Willie to win—and just as I had tumbled to this truth Willie died!

John Gardiner (now of Wardheads) lived in The Myres for years; he also spoke of it as a grand house.

George Ogston and his mother live there now; George says 'it will do', and when George says that it means a lot.

So The Myres stays—that and all—with the careful addition of a bath, etc., a good patch up and probably a fight to the death with the sanitary inspector over the height of the ceilings, which are 8 feet 6 inches instead of the prescribed 9 feet; but I am sure I am right; if one has a house that several generations of families have been happy in and like, leave it alone—the chances are they know more about it than the sanitary inspector.

I think it may amuse you to hear more of Adam.

Adam, being a character, enters into the Megginch story; he left traces of himself behind, as indeed they all did. He established himself as M.P. for Shaftesbury; he also married the daughter of the last Duke of Bolton, which gave him social status, but his tastes—like mine—were not for society people; he was a friend of Sheridan, the playwright, and Doctor Johnson. Sheridan was producing a show (*The School for Scandal*) and was particularly anxious to have his friend Adam amongst the first-night audience, for Adam had a most infectious laugh, and a laugh to a comedy playwright is worth having. Johnson and Adam went into training for the first night at a coffee-house; Adam overtrained himself and so arrived at the theatre decidedly drunk but subconsciously remembering that he had to laugh; however, he was not in a state in which he could even hear the dialogue and so Johnson prodded him when anything amusing was said on the stage. At the big laugh of the play, the line about 'Wasn't it Joseph?' Johnson punched Adam, who had fallen asleep; he woke up, laughed, and continued laughing so much that the whole show was held up and could not proceed until Adam had been taken from the theatre.

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After that he was nicknamed amongst his friends, Laughing Megginch.

Adam kept a book of highly scandalous anecdotes and pornographic stories which I should have loved to read—and might have formed a sort of eighteenth-century Pepys—but a Victorian ancestress destroyed them as being outrageous.

Adam was well educated—his father had sent him over to Holland for his education at Leyden University, going by boat from Dundee; he was also well read and had good wits. When it came to the time of the war against America, Adam managed to get the job of catering for our troops engaged in that disastrous contest, and he also managed to get Colin, his brother, in as Paymaster. You would have thought that, between them, they would have done pretty well out of it! And indeed they did, but unfortunately the war did not go right and when we lost we also lost a large quantity of materials, so Adam had to cover his catering activities by returning any money he had managed to make and a lot more as well. To do this and still keep in with the Government my family sold Lennoch—the original property we had been given when we came over from Hungary and which we had managed to hold on to for nearly seven hundred years.

In later life Adam concentrated on Megginch and planted some well-designed avenues in the Dutch style—doubtless in memory of his early education—and as I have mentioned, amongst other buildings he built The Myres.

The lands of which Oldwood and Balcillum were formed were originally common grazing, all linked up in a series of amazingly complicated agreements with the feudal smallholders. In the break-up of the system every proprietor grabbed what he could. A period of chaos ensued in which the swapping about of the common grazing rights and rights-of-way, conflicting drainage schemes, and a multitude of obscure disputes, made the resulting farms into a messy patch work, the straightening out of which has cost me a bottle or two of aspirin.

It so happened that these disputes coincided with a period when my family were in one of the many tricky positions in which we are constantly finding ourselves. It was after the rather complicated affair occasioned by Charles Edward Stewart. We had, to a certain extent, backed the wrong side and were busy settling in with the winning side. Adam managed this all right but it took some time. He worked his way in as M.P. for Montrose Boroughs and afterwards for Shaftesbury

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and finally got the family back on to their precarious perch. It was however during the early days of the trouble that the dividing-up process took place and he thought it politic not to grab too much; he therefore let people take bits here and there, and this has made the task of straightening out almost impossible.

J. M. D. (my grandfather) built Balcallum and Oldwood in the 'sixties; he built them very well and took immense trouble to make them as complete as possible but unfortunately he built to measure. He thought it would be a sound plan to have a couple of family farms—that is farms worked entirely by the family in the farmhouse. For this purpose he considered they should be as mixed in output as possible and designed the buildings so that they could keep a few cows, a few pigs, a 'puckle' hens, and some beef cattle; in fact, there was no sideline he did not allow for. Unfortunately there is a catch in family farming and also a catch in having a bit of everything. The family grow up with remarkable rapidity, fall in love, and split away from the next. They want to improve themselves, especially in Scotland; get tired of working fourteen hours a day for their keep and fag money, and go off to Canada or the States where, in a few years, they make good. Thus gradually the workers of the family farm dwindle to the old, over-worked folks and perhaps the soft one of the family. From this point the farm begins to go back, and nothing goes back quicker. Again, while one track farming is in most places an impossibility it is not a good policy to have a try at everything, for few men ever thoroughly master one subject and to attempt to be expert at a number of different and exacting small-profit businesses means, in the long run, losing whatever capital one has started with.

For these reasons Oldwood and Balcallum have always been, for both landlord and tenants, 'pains in the neck'.

They followed the general rule of difficult farms and went back to grass which was let annually for grazing; the well-built steadings started to disintegrate in their own time; the houses were let to people without much interest in them, at least with only the interest taken in a house and a garden on an annual tenancy.

I have farmed Oldwood now for fifteen years. We have converted the buildings to a modern dairy; there is a herd of fifty-two tuberculin-tested Ayrshires; the farmhouse has a bathroom and telephone and electric light; the Bothy, where the land girls live, has a bathroom and

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electric light; we have put no artificial manure on the place for some time, and the cereal crops are so rich it is a job to get them harvested; I don't know how many tons of mangold we grow to the acre (because one does not know these things truthfully) but they take some carting. I should hate to have to go back and build Oldwood up again and there is still more to do before I can say it is finished.

Our first manager at Oldwood was Torquil Stewart Richardson, who got the M.C. recently; he was shut up during the whole of the Tobruk episode. Torquil broke the back of the place—he put more into it than a man should working for somebody else. Torquil learned farming at MacGill and 'the world'—knocking around Canada he knew what it was to stook a hundred acres on piecework; he became one of the most popular characters in the Megginch family.

Alan Hynd has managed there a long time now; Alan is filled with wisdom—all learned from the book called Practical Experience, but he believes in trying out the new as well, and when I went in for combined harvesting he was one of the few who had faith in it from the start. Alan does not like 'too big a way of doing'; he comes of a family mostly smallholders and (although he has a slight horror of smallholding) has leanings that way, but what has made him indispensable in wartime is his gift for understanding and managing women. I do not think Mr. Earl Carrol could have much over Alan for managing girls.

Some of the girls at Oldwood must be working up for a long-service medal (if they give one to the W.L.A.). Nan, who came from a tobacconist's shop in Glasgow, has been at Oldwood practically since the start of the movement. Helen came the same day but has learned more and is now a first-class milker. Indeed all the girls are great triers. I would not say that a girl born and brought up on a farm does not take more kindly to the work, but these kids have made a good imitation of the real thing. Helen and Peggy sometimes milk the whole herd themselves and think nothing of it.

For some years when the farms were not sufficiently advanced to have their own staff, implements, etc., we had to do all the arable work of all the farms from a central place, but Oldwood is now entirely on its own; when it came back to its own Jack Deuchars came back to it; he had been lease-lent to the central organization for some years, but Jack is really more Oldwood than I am, or Alan, or anybody else is.

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In 1915 he unyoked his horses one Saturday, watered and groomed them, then went off and enlisted in the Scots Guards—Jack is in the six-foot class. In 1918 he came back on another Saturday and started work on the Monday morning. I do not know that one can tell any more descriptive story of Scotch ploughmen than that. God forbid that we should ever erect another statue in this country, but if we do—as a change from generals to Scotch ploughmen—I do not think one could go far wrong in taking Jack as a model. He has only once been ill in his life—with influenza—and Jack will do exactly what he is paid to do—no more and no less! He may be out a few minutes early in the morning, but would not dream of starting until the exact time; he brings his horses to the water-trough at night at the precise moment for knocking off. It is on this bedrock of worker integrity that Scottish farmers have become successful—or rather, have managed to carry on.

For three years of war we had to smash up this steady system, had to put in hours of overtime and work as many as four Sundays in a row. But daylight is ahead.

The two big jobs in combining these farms are the removal of the timber and altering the ditches. The wood on Oldwood was the worst trouble; I cannot describe the difficulty of removing it. We nibbled at it for a long time (as it was impossible to get outside help), pulling out trees with tractors. Later, when Keyhole Kate joined the party she got the fringe out but her rope would not go far enough while she found the ground too soft to enter. Finally, when the trees were out, we got the Gyro and stirred up all the roots; but our job had hardly begun for it was necessary to get the roots away and collect the sticks. At this time we had been sent a number of 'volunteer', but paid, harvesters; they came from all over the country—from places as far distant as Kent—and had various kinds of civilian jobs; one, for instance, was a school-mistress in Wigan, and two girls came off the production-belt of a well-known automobile factory. When we had got them fitted in to a hut, more or less comfortably, and were ready to begin harvesting, it started to rain and kept on raining—at least it never got dry enough to harvest.

I asked these girls if they would like to collect a few sticks and they said they would, so they went to Oldwood where they worked in a line, piling the branches up and stacking them in heaps for burning or cartage.

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The sight of this variegated collection of girls heaving sticks all day in the pouring rain came very near my personal picture of the feudal system, but they did their best and they eventually cleared the wood, although we still have heaps of roots along the side of the field and these we cart off gradually from time to time.

Oldwood has at the moment a Fordson tractor, piloted by Jackie Deuchars (Jack's son). Now Jackie is the product of the new age and he loves tractors; he has hopped on to one and driven it since he was ten years old and drives a tractor very well. Jackie is now fourteen, consequently he cannot take the machine on to the main road, which is rather a good thing as I am against carting short distances by tractor—we have not found it work out economically as opposed to horses and motor-lorry for long distance.

There are three horses at Oldwood. One—Una—is the prize of the whole estate; her mother was third in the Paris Exhibition of Percherons; Una is just all that a Percheron should be; she pairs with Star, a grey also, but a Clydesdale-Percheron cross, while Clyde is the orra horse—which is Scots for spare. The girls like Clyde, who is incredibly old and smells rather high, but Clyde is a favourite; he hasn't to be driven, he knows exactly what to do, including the rule of the road—I should not be surprised if he held out his off-fore when going round a corner!

Nan said one day:

'Oh! It's raining—and we have left Clyde out!' She ran and brought the horse in.

Alan tells him to go home when the cart is loaded and Clyde goes home.

I bought Clyde at a farm sale years ago for £13 and do not think he has been a bad investment.

It would be boring to describe Balcallum in detail because what I have said about Oldwood goes for it as well. There is a great deal to be done on Balcallum before it can be said to be right, but I believe there is slow improvement. The only Balcallum story which might be worth including is of a lawsuit I had with the Board of Agriculture for Scotland.

I defended my own case. I had never tried to do such a thing before and so it proved quite interesting, although rather nerve-racking. However, it is rather a tribute to the fairness of Scotch law to record



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official witnesses than to the amateur ones, for it is obvious that they must know more about the meaning of their forms than we do; besides, the total number of witnesses was in their favour while not one of them budged an inch on 'forage' or reseedling. Heaven forbid that I ever fight another case against anybody, but if I do I have learned several good tips. I was sorry about the whole affair, not about losing—I am a good loser, one has to be as a farmer—but because, although some of the officials were fairly local, they never approached me to have a friendly chat.

I have for a long time looked with horror on the small official with unlimited powers, not because these people are in any way bad at their job—they are often very conscientious and do their utmost to carry out their work efficiently—but because they have too much power and consequently (through the necessity of sticking to general rules laid down by unlocal bodies) become a paralysing influence on one's activities; nor have I found in practice that their work is of any help to practical people—we can deal with all our affairs quicker and better without them. I look towards the spread of this power and the greater centralization of control as the forerunners of a *cul-de-sac* which will waste our energies and bring about yet another slump. Obviously, placed as I am, I would think that way, and I have tried to shake this growing fear off by saying that it is all prejudice, that I am a hereditary fighter, that I must be extremely biased. But one does not get through the life I have got through without being fairly broad-minded; I can see the good and the harm. I fought a very hard election for the County Council when I was twenty-one and beat my next-door friend—a Brigadier-General; later, when I had to be away, I gave him the seat and later on again, when I was home once more, he handed it back to me. When this war came I felt I could not do the position justice and handed it over to a representative tradesman in our village; after the war (if there is still a county council) it will be about time we stopped this handing about and had an election again to see whom the electors want! During these ins and outs of local governments I learned something about officials; how painstaking and honest they are; I learned that many of them could not see the practical side for the rules of the game, but I found also that the rules could not be altered without upsetting the whole fabric. One case always remains in my mind.

Our by-laws for housing were very carefully worked out. A chap,



WARDHEADS HOUSE



YARD AT WARDHEADS



THE FIRST NEW HOUSE

## BALCALLUM, OLDWOOD, AND THE MYRES

however, found a bit of ground on which he thought he would like to build himself a house. He started by buying an old tram and dumped it on an odd piece of ground. Later, being a mason by trade, he built on other bits and pieces until through the years he had put up the house presumably of his dreams. During all these years the county council turned their wrath on him; he must have had sheaves of every sort of threat and injunction, forbidding him to build the house, pointing out that it did not conform to the by-laws, etc. As a dutiful member of the council I joined in with the hunt against him, but my sporting spirit was always on his side and every year as I drove past and saw his house getting a little further forward, my heart warmed to a man who wanted a house his way, and got it.

In writing this I hope I have not reopened the wound; the house has been built so many years now that I rather think he must be safe.

In my book, *Charter for the Soil*, I tried to give a solution for our farming troubles which would work, and to give the plan from a completely unbiased viewpoint by asking myself, 'Is that what you really think, or is it the way that suits you?' It is rather a refreshing thing to do. Try it. You will find how difficult it is to be unbiased. From Plato to Joad everybody has been biased and always will be; the thing is to discover what their biases are. In this book you will see mine and therefore, when I have said disagreeable things about the Agricultural Committee or the official class, you will be able to understand the reason and take my remarks at their true value.

I have deliberately sidetracked you from Balcallum because I do not wish to bore you and thought my adventures in the case of Drummond v. Rex might prove more entertaining, but there is also another reason. When I started to write about Balcallum I realized what a very long way it has to go, what a great deal has to be done, before I would care to let even my most sympathetic friend see it. It has been all uphill work. The background was the same as on the other farms—drainage gone, weed-infested fields, buildings in a deplorable state—but on the other farms I have seen a faint smile; every way I look at Balcallum however I am greeted with a scowl. I have had it in my hands long enough to expect more and it is not for the lack of trying. Somebody asked me about Balcallum once, my reply was: 'Frankly, it would be a suitable punishment to put Hitler in as a tenant, at a high rent.' Perhaps we had better leave it at that.

## *The Hill of White Stones*

There is a certain amount of marginal land and hill-ground attached to Megginch. The property is in the parish of Kilspindie (which being interpreted means 'The Hill of White Stones'). This is rather an unfair agricultural description of the land for there are some pockets of very good soil on which splendid crops of barley and potatoes can be grown.

For some years I farmed the hill farm of Balmyre, hoping to draw it into the web of the plan; but as hill farming needs an entirely different technique from that of lowland farming numerous unforeseen difficulties arose which made it very difficult to work it in with the farms on flat ground.

Many of the fields are so far away from the buildings that it is impossible to cart dung to them economically; one must therefore resort to dodging round the humus question by temporary leys, feeding off roots, or growing rape. Again, the geological formation of a hill farm makes every field a problem equal to a crossword puzzle; thus you get clay, loam, and sand pocketed about over the field while outcrops of rocks form little islands here and there.

Although we partially mechanized the farm, the mechanization of a hill farm is not by any means satisfactory. There is much more wear and tear on expensive implements. Again, a large acreage of the ground must of necessity remain uncultivated; the best one can do with it is to fence it up in enclosures of a hundred acres or so and rotate stock round. True, a great deal of research and experiment has been undertaken to find methods of making this rough grazing more profitable, to hold a larger herd of stock by establishing better pasture. The foundation of these improvements lies in tearing up the existing turf, adding lime, and reseeded, usually with some form of phosphoric manure and nitrogenous fertilizer. Earnest scientists have, with small parcels of land, shown a profit and loss account over a few years which resulted on the profit side, but the labour and capital expenses involved in this reclamation are very high per acre, nor is it always completely successful.

My experiences of hill farming make me think that this mechanical

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method of attack is wrong. I do not believe that a hill farm can be expected to compete successfully with a good-soil lowland farm by these methods. The idea of trying to copy lowland methods on hill ground is wrong—a farmer or landlord endeavouring to compete by the same means always holds the dirty end of the stick. If you look round at the hill farms of the country, the generally dilapidated state of the buildings bears out my theory. I believe further that if a man with unlimited capital took on a hill farm and reclaimed the ground according to the best modern recipes, he would find in fifty or sixty years (the time necessary to test out a farming system) that even if he had made a profit that profit would be very much less than the easy-land farmer's. He could not have such a high standard of living or pay such good wages from the same amount of capital.

What is true of the individual is true of the State—the prolonged subsidizing of these reclamation schemes is only prolonging the ultimate agony and impoverishing the capital of the country.

For these reasons I came to the conclusion that I could never make Balmyre fit into my plan, for it meant carrying on two entirely different methods of farming, and I wanted to boil it down to one system, with standard methods, breeds of stock, and implements.

From all this do not conclude that I think there is no future in hill farming; of course there is, but not along the lines we are working on now. If I had my own lowland land finished and had unlimited capital, I would try out my own plan of hill farming, and believe it could be made to pay just as well, for capital invested, as a lowland plan; but unfortunately it would take twenty years or so before it started to get results. I had better not deviate to tell you the details of this plan because it could hardly be described in less than the length of this book!

I do not know if anybody can imagine the rush there is for farms during a boom; when it got around that I would either let or sell Balmyre it seemed to me that the whole population wished to become farmers overnight; moreover, they were prepared to pay very handsomely for the privilege of getting into one of the most hazardous, up-and-down, hard-working, and disappointing professions in the world. The new rush of farmers are also prepared to pay very encouraging rents to make a landlord's heart warm; for with such rents it would be possible to maintain buildings, houses, drainage, etc. as they should be maintained, and to come out on the right side. However,

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such rents at the present moment are about as tangible as a politician's promise; one cannot get labour or materials to do repairs and so the rent simply drifts back to the Government in the form of taxation. In any case a lease or a rent under present legislation means only a number of typewritten pages tied by pink tape with several rather scrawly signatures on it; for if a tenant finds his rent too high he has only to appeal in a proper manner to have it reduced, if he gets fed-up with farming it is only necessary to aggravate the landlord sufficiently for him to give the tenant notice to quit and the tenant obtains two years' rent in addition to top price for any improvements he has made. The only tangible thing about a modern lease is the fee paid to the lawyer for drawing it up.

I was therefore only concerned to find somebody who would farm the place well and I was anxious to put him in at a rent making it possible for him to make some money

I have found that the type of tenant who farms from a lawyer's office is a bad investment in other ways; he has prolonged fights with his men who take it out of the place; usually, too, he is so outraged at the way he believes he is being treated by the outside and his own inside world that he has not time to farm properly. I was lucky for I have some neighbours who tenant a farm off another estate, and who are by far the best farmers in the district; these people desired to expand and were keen to try their hand at Balmyre. The Taits consist of a large family, and are the type of people who are not afraid of work; thus—if the Government allow them—they will make a good thing off this farm and at the same time improve the place. So I let the farm on a non-repair basis at the pre-war rent, which was a reduction of the original rent—itself considered low—and I was pleased with the deal.

## *The Stony Rocks for the Coneys*

Rabbits on hill ground are always a problem. Before the war we had a gamekeeper who could adjust the level of rabbits so they did not get in the way; he—Tom—came on leave the other day—Able Seaman Logie. He was not only our keeper for twelve

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years but has been a lifelong friend—his life, not mine, for Tom is younger than I am. He looked G.S. in his 'tidley rig', said the Russian convoy was 'noisy', he did not want to be a 'stripey', even for the chance of 'gash rum'; 'Jimmy the One' would be after his 'block' all the time. Since he came on leave someone had 'given him the buzz' that I am not keeping my shot-gun the way it should be kept. When Tom saw my gun he examined the locks sadly, then remarked: 'You should get your bloody badge dipped for that!'

We had an afternoon's shooting before he was off to his next adventure. The bag was one hare and two pheasants. The soothing sensation of walking through turnips and damp coverts had the effect of bringing Tom back to his old speech. He laid out the bag sorrowfully, 'Is that no' terrible?' he said.

Hugh, a former satellite of Tom's—Sergeant Mitchell to you—looked immensely impressive when he came on leave. There's over six foot of Hugh and his bronzed face is set-off by the sand and sunset ribbon with the famous '8'. Hugh is going to be a policeman when he gets back to 'Civvy Street'. He thinks the gamekeeping business is played out and he believes he will get through the war.

'If I did na die of the tea in Tobruk I'll get through the rest, surely.'

We design to weave Tom into the Central Mother Poultry Farm with assistance, but Tom himself would rather have a few good dogs and a gun, and I'm not sure he is not right. We spend annually a very large sum on 'ratters'; again, although we let the rabbit trapping, this is not satisfactory as the trapper likes to allow the stock to accumulate until the winter, when the price is sweeter and the rabbits are at their best—a policy which does not agree with farming.

I knew a man who had a property on the west coast of Scotland. You can picture the place with mist blowing over the high hills and emerald patches of grass surrounded by the dark green of the bracken; way down below a sea loch foaming on a white sand beach and high up a spring-fed tarn, complete with shoals of eight-to-the-pound trout. It was my friend's aim to make a rent of sorts from the property with his black-faced sheep. In addition to the sheep the estate netted a good six hundred a year by sending the winter-trapped rabbits to the Glasgow market. One day the shepherd came to his employer, 'If we could only kill off all the rabbits we could keep so many more sheep'. This incident coincided with one of the infrequent occasions when hill sheep



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were a profitable undertaking, so my friend decided to conduct total war against the rabbits. Gassing and other expedients reduced the coneys to their lowest terms. Now the interesting part of the story arises. The ground *minus* rabbits would hold no more sheep than the ground *plus* rabbits. My friend was therefore six hundred a year poorer and had to stand the capital cost of exterminating the rabbits.

I have had similar experiences on hill ground. Rabbits are definitely a nuisance on good arable land, but on hill farming they do not seem to matter so much, in fact they add to the receipts of the place.

Tom's son—aged ten—is a born gamekeeper. He has an appreciation of natural things, an inborn sense of nature. If you ask James Logie in the spring to show you 'the nests' he will take you round and point out not only the old hen pheasant one has seen every day crouched in a patch of ivy, but the bullfinch's nest in the juniper bush which one thought nobody else could possibly have discovered.

## *Painted Wings and Old Tins*

Balmyre is traversed by two small streams; the larger of the two falls over a ridge of rock into a pool some distance below. This cascade occurs at a point where it is possible to get a particularly intriguing view of the surrounding district; below the fall the burn flows through a minute gorge of no agricultural importance. It had seemed to me an interesting place which could be made into a beauty spot by judicious tree-cutting, making a few rough paths, placing a seat or so in suitable positions; one side of the little gorge would lend itself to establishing a collection of our Scottish ferns, while on the sunnier side it would be possible to grow a representative collection of our wild flowers. Adjacent to the cascade is a small marsh, where bog plants could be cultivated, and there are also sunny rocks in whose crevices our rock plants might be established.

'I have all my life been intensely interested in butterflies, not with the idea of nailing them to boards and boring my friends about them, but because—to me—they are the most beautiful creatures in the

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world; their life-history is intensely exciting and at all stages fascinating; I know few more perfectly satisfying shapes than the symmetrical egg of a butterfly. The caterpillar is fun and its camouflaging colours make it hard enough to find to give zest to the search; again, the butterfly's habit of laying only on certain food plants and the caterpillar's inability to be nourished by any other food plant gives a detective story's interest to the search. The chrysalis is an affair of extreme beauty, while the apparently lifeless shape suddenly giving birth to the resplendent insect is a symbol of the dead body and the soul, which gives one encouragement to believe that our present life may be a prelude to something worth while.

From all angles therefore the observation of butterflies combines the pleasures of philately, detective stories, or only walking on the squares of the pavement!

Again, it can be practised in most country districts—or could be before the war. I won't know until after the war and the resumption of motoring what is left of butterfly land, but fear it will be a sad story. A great deal of the breeding-ground of the Brimstone (those large yellow things) has gone in hedge-cleanings and the Fen developments have knocked out the spread of *P. Machaon* (the swallow tail). I have indeed been fortunate to have observed—I think, in all stages—every known British butterfly except a Purple Emperor caterpillar. Abroad, of course, the game becomes desperately exciting. I had a wonderful time with butterflies in Jamaica. I did not cheat and buy a crib, so I had to find out for myself their habits, food, plants, etc., and even to supply them with names, although of course they had all been named and documented years before. I managed to trace the whole life-history of one ravishing insect, (I christened it Football Jersey).

I have often tried to introduce those of my friends who are harmless to agriculture; I very nearly established the British Swallow Tail and had the Black American Swallow Tail 'broody', laying eggs on its food plant, walnut.

There are two species which I think could be established in the Cascade beauty spot; the large copper *Rutilus* (Continental variety). Despair, the British variety, is, thanks to bug hunters and drainage boards, completely extinct. The other is a very exciting speciality of my own, a distinct variety of the Scottish Argus, a nippy little butterfly, whose food plant is *helianthemum* (rock rose). I found this variety

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accidentally and have never told its habitat to anyone—probably the only one of my own secrets I have ever kept! It lives (I hope still) in a tiny glen where there is a very limited supply of its food plant; it is, in this miniature valley, hemmed off by many miles from the next supply of rock rose and thus, I imagine, is really unique. I have, of course, taken no specimens and—as I have said—avoided careless talk, otherwise it might be wiped out—and stuffed throughout the world in museum cases with glass fronts on which children would breathe and adults remark casually, 'Fancy catching all those bees!' The Argus (which for the sake of swank I call to myself 'Drummondi') I think of importing to my wild garden, probably in the form of larvae, once its food plant is established.

This beauty-spot idea has been running through my head for years, I think ever since I first knew the place, but unfortunately—like most of my ambitious ideas—seems unlikely to come off.

During the period I farmed Balmyre I was able to put right a point that had worried me for twenty years.

For generations the Cascade had been the tipping-ground for miles and miles of old wire, tins, bits of implements, all the unwanted mechanical refuse that accumulates on a farm, and there never seemed much hope of getting this dump out; or of knowing where to put it when it was out; so I jumped at the first really big scrap drive. The junk had all to be hauled up by tractors and required several people to hook, unhook, and collect it; the removal took quite a time and, of course, cost a great deal more than the scrap was worth; nor was it very popular with the scrap merchants. To get rid of it I devised the idea of sprinkling in a certain amount of good material; there was an old water-wheel, a real prize for a scrap man. I suppose if I had bargained with the various ministries I could have saved the old lodge gates and railings on the ground that they were somewhat in the nature of museum pieces, the sort of things which if torn out in peace-time someone might write to the papers about, describing their removal as vandalism; but it seemed to me rather unpatriotic to keep them and somewhat selfish when the occupant of the smallest villa was gladly removing its railings and opening its minute front garden to the local dogs for fun and games, so I jumbled them in with the tins and wire or used them for austerity purposes. By these ruses I was able to clear out the whole rubbish-heap.

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There is not time or, for that matter, inclination to go on with the scheme at the moment, but I have tried—in the new lease—to safeguard the place from becoming a rubbish-heap again and have also left a loophole so that—if it was ever made into a wild garden—the public could visit it.

What would the public do with it? My observation of the British public, in the country, has not been very encouraging; for a start, they will write their names on everything and not only write but cut them deeply into trees, seats, or anything cuttable. And not only names: they have ribald—sometimes highly pornographic—doggerel which they believe should be inscribed for the benefit of subsequent visitors. I do not know if it would be any good supplying a slate and chalk for the use and pleasure of autograph writers or, if one put up a small house, murally decorated with blue-pencil rhymes and dirty stories, it would assuage the prose and verse writers.

Again, my observations incline me to the opinion that the sightseer believes a wild flower to be a thing which should be picked immediately on sight; I remember watching a passing motorist tearing up purple-spotted orchids, roots and all, and stuffing them into the front pocket of his car. I was surprised to see the make of car he drove. I had formerly supposed that a person with the necessary financial ability to buy such a conveyance would have the education to know the flowers would certainly die—on that hot day—before he got back to town; also to realize that by his manner of picking he had destroyed a species of our most interesting wild flowers already rapidly losing ground against civilization. I remarked to him:

‘Have they no carnations left in the flower-shops, or perhaps you are too mean to buy cultivated orchids for your . . .’

I did not finish the sentence, as I could not for the life of me imagine what sort of woman he kept; it occurred to me that she might not be overjoyed to receive a sheaf of wilted flowers caked in mud.

Thus when open to the public the Cascade Helianthus might have a short life and the food supply of the Argus could disappear on one Saturday afternoon. The British public in peace-time are not litter-minded and my glade I feel would become speckled with discarded cigarette-packets and the wrappings of boiled sweets, while it might occur to people to have picnics which would mean that the primroses would become sprinkled with the jagged ends of long-suffering milk

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bottles—in other words, it is possible that the beauty spot might, in the first season, revert to an imitation of a public park and a city refuse dump; or perhaps, even worse, the average sightseer would see nothing interesting in a collection of rare ferns or out-of-the-ordinary wild flowers; nor would the extreme thrill of seeing large Coppers basking on *Rumex* (dock) move them further than to remark, 'Kill that fly'. The alternative of spattering the ground with notices, 'Don't Pick the Flowers', or the rather Scottish expression I have noticed in a well-known public park, 'Please To Keep Off The Grass,' would be terrible.

Yet there are people who would really appreciate such a spot, take a great interest in it, and respect it for other visitors. How could the sheep be separated from the goats?

### *Silence in the Pig Market*

**T**he original plan was Dairy Cows, Pigs, Fruit, Vegetables, Poultry—in that order of importance.

The pig production was planned in this manner:

First, a special farm for breeding stock. From this mother pig farm the different farms on the estate would draw off a regular stream of two-month-old piglets, rear and fatten them; finally, the fattened pigs would be processed by a central bacon factory and sold direct to customers in standard one-pound containers of bacon or sliced ham. The by-products would be suitably disposed of; some of them returning as food to stock and others as fertilizer or bone meal to the soil.

Pigs, unfortunately, run in cycles of profitability—boom, slump, boom, slump (accent on the SLUMP!)

One naturally aims at a small and steady margin of profit in farming and one is therefore alarmed by sudden booms almost as much as sudden slumps, for agriculture must flow evenly without violent variations. In the same manner nature slides through the seasons doing each job at the correct time.

It has never seemed possible to me to steady the pig market by

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boards or control laws, for all these measures mean unprofitable or stagnant pools in the steady flow and there is—and should be—not enough profit in essential foodstuffs to allow much divergence from the direct path of producer-consumer. Unnecessary handling or control in this direct route means some sort of half-way house or houses, whose cost must be borne by either consumer or producer; furthermore, waste occurs and agriculture cannot stand waste

My pig plan has had to tread water during the war for the restriction of feeding-stuffs and the necessity for using everything possible off the farm for human consumption has limited our supplies so that we can only maintain the breeding stock and sell the young pigs direct in the market. However, this hold-up has enabled us to make big advances in the quality of our breeding stock and to improve their vigour and fertility qualities. The other day a sow produced our record—a litter of twenty. In all livestock breeding one likes to see a new record cropping up from time to time; it shows one is getting the quality aimed for and one can turn one's attention to selection for some other needed factor.

Shipbrigs—the mother pig farm—has had, like its name, a good many changes of purpose. The name has changed four times in a hundred and fifty years; thus: Sheep Bridge, Sheep Riggs, Ship Riggs, and finally, Shipbrigs.

It is said (I think wrongly) to be the birthplace of the poet, Thomas Hood. Hood was, as far as I can make out, born (if born there at all) in one of a number of feudal smallholdings around the site of the present farm, now long since disappeared. I do not know if anybody remembers this poet nowadays, but his 'I remember' was the sort of poem one was compelled to learn by heart in my youth.

'The fir trees, dark and high;  
I used to think their slender tops  
Must almost reach the sky;  
It was a childish ignorance,  
But now, 'tis little joy,  
To know, I'm farther off from Heaven  
Than when I was a boy.'

'Well—you can't say fairer than that!

In the final polish-up of the estate I mean to put a couple of gateposts at the entrance to Shipbrigs and incorporate some reference to

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the poet with—perhaps—a portion of one of his poems. Holiday-makers and strangers like something to make an excuse for a walk; besides, anybody who lived in one of the clay feudal smallholdings and survived to write readable poetry deserves some recognition. There are fir trees still but not so very dark or high!

When cleaning the place up we cashed in a couple of old Scots firs whose annual rings placed them as the possible trees of the poet.

Robert Drummond undertook the feudal slum clearance necessary to bring the present farm into existence. Robert was rather a delightful man; he captained the *General Elliot*, the ship my family hoped to make a fortune out of—and very nearly did. Robert took her more than twenty times round the Cape to China. I have read a great portion of the ship's log and his own diary—it was no garden party! I think I know what Robert was like; he was sweet and had charming ideas about everything; he had a tough life; becalming, shortage of provisions, scurvy, and bad storms got him down in the end. An entry in the diary says, 'I have not the strength to do this voyage again'. But—like me—he outlined during his years at sea a plan for improving Megginch. He did not live long enough to complete his outlined plan although he did a lot; organized an estate-building staff, quarried stones, made bricks, and put up some amazingly well-built buildings to his own drawn plans—Shipbrigs was one. I can realize what a lot of trouble and care he, and the men who built it, must have put into the work; the walls are beautifully built, all the lintels and windowsills carefully hewn, while the design of the holding was both practical and pleasing. The dwelling-house needed very little work on our part to make it up-to-date; we put in a bath and scullery and a new kitchen range and did a certain amount of plaster and floor patching; it only needs electric light (bespoke for) and another window (left over owing to the black-out menace) to make it a really nice dwelling.

After Robert's day the farmlands of Shipbrigs were incorporated in Inchconans, so that the steading stood for years unwanted; later it was turned into a starch mill and, later still, into an implement shed. By the time it came to my turn things were not so good; the ungalvanized nails which had held the slates in place had stopped being nails, and slates off the roof stuck up in the rank grass which grew near the walls, or lay unnoticed amongst the bramble bushes. The cobbled courtyard was not only so covered with grass that the cobbles came to us as a

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surprise, but sizeable ash and thorns grew over it. The doors had gone and there were few windows. To make matters worse, our local crook hit upon the idea that the lead ridging of the roofwork might be worth the price of a drink or so, and forthwith removed it. The policeman of the day asked me to go and identify the stolen lead. I did not feel justified in pointing to a large heap of metal in a scrap-yard and saying, 'This haggart came off Shipbrigs' roof'; but a neighbouring farmer, whom Jock had stripped, identified his property practically in the foundry crucible.

I do not think much happened to Jock over the lead episode but a lot has since; he has for many years featured in the 'Crime Does Not Pay' series. Although nothing happened to Jock a lot happened to the Shipbrigs' roof. It ceased!

Getting Shipbrigs into circulation was a big struggle; we renewed the roof with our concrete tiles and converted the inside to a piggery; we took a lot of trouble to try and keep the pen floors warm, laying hollow bricks and tiles on ashes and covering them with a coating of cement just thick enough and no more. Pigs and cold floors don't agree! We had also to build a brick addition to get our full quota of breeding sows housed. The yard took ages to clean up; finally we covered the old cobbles with stone chips and then concrete.

The piglets have, in addition, outside runs they can get to from their pens; alternatively, by a system of gates, it is possible to guide them into the orchard, which is divided into three portions and grazed—or rather rooted up—in rotation. There is a nice little strip of trees and a good hedge sheltering the orchard except for a twenty-foot gap through which the wind whistles; in this gap I have planted a deal row—a Norfolk term meaning a Scotch fir hedge. This type of hedge takes time to establish but it is the best windbreak I know.

Our first pig man—Duncan—had been a painter; he had a very good sense of organization, a tidy mind, and a kid with curly hair who sang, at the age of three, 'Run, Rabbit, Run' and other ballads of the period extraordinarily well.

Duncan went off to the army and Morris moved in. Morris is a character; it seems pigmen *are* characters. Morris was originally a tailor by trade and worked with a number of well-known firms; on this score we have quite a number of jokes for he usually wears an incredibly



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torn pair of trousers with a vague resemblance to those supplied to the Home Guard. My argument is, 'What's the good of spending a lifetime learning tailoring if you can't mend your own—if they are your own—trousers?' One can't get angry with Morris, he is such a trier. He keeps the piggery very clean and puts in countless hours at farrowing times—occasions which often occur in the middle of the night. Morris is an Aberdonian and is not afraid to work; he takes his summer holidays so that they correspond with sugar-beet thinning and can therefore be spent profitably, hoeing, piecework all day and far into the night. His wife is paid to look after the pigs on his weekdays off but Morris seems to work continuously; for this reason we have now added Jack Speed's son (Speed Senior is head ploughman at Inchconans); with young Bob, Morris should get his proper holidays; but if I know Morris he will still work continuously and slightly aimlessly.

We have thirty to forty breeding sows, pedigree Large White, and a couple of boars as a wartime complement, but the peacetime target is considerably more; they live on an unbalanced diet of unwanted potatoes, *plus* aerodrome swill, and do remarkably well on it; in addition they get anything there is, a term which covers such widely separated foodstuffs as brussels sprout tops and horse chestnuts. For some time I toyed with the idea of changing over from Large White sows to Wessex Saddle Back crossed with a Large White boar, and the idea is represented by Alberta, Diana, and Gogi. It is considered that this cross matures fourteen days quicker than the pure line, but they have the disadvantage of looking very nondescript and are also liable to give scedy cut in the final bacon.

Again, by careful breeding, we have improved the Large White stock so that Alberta's, Diana's, and Gogi's crossbred children only just hold their own—in fact I do not think Alberta's really do.

I think the Wessex stand heat better than the Large White—who sunburn very badly, but this does not really matter much in Scotland.

We have heating in part of the piggery for winter breeding, and although it is of the simplest form—the type of boiler designed for backyard greenhouses—it seems to give a sufficiency of heat, but it would be better to have additional heating, for it has happened that during intensely cold spells the heated portion has become overcrowded and farrowing sows have overflowed to colder regions. In these places the piglets develop long fur and a ratty appearance with

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an alligator type of head. We fight against anaemia with doses of iron to the very young.

The final heating I have in mind is electric. When the promised grid supply is put in I believe we could have a series of plugs arranged over each pen and a small heating element with a large saucer-shaped reflector; this would concentrate the heat on one corner of the pen; rails could be supplied and the piglets would—I hope—gather there between feeds in a happy pink pie. I believe this would save a great many deaths by crushing.

On the whole I think farrowing rails or other gadgets are unnecessary; if the sow and the pig-keeper are right the litters will come through and if they are not no artificial aids will help.

If it were possible for the dead to return I believe Robert would be quite happy about his farm, for it has now attained, to a certain degree, the gloss of accomplishment and has a slight look of prosperity.

Down the road from the piggery Robert built a little 'folly' in a wood, *à la Petit Trianon* but 'petiter'. He sat there and read the classics; also Persian poetry—a language of which he was a master. There is something soothing to me in these days of itchy feet and roaring methanization, to think of Robert in a dark-brown swallow-tail coat, wig, and double-breasted yellow waistcoat, sitting in his 'folly' reading Omar Khayyam in the original. I found a calf-bound Horace, given him by the painter Romney; his favourite passages are marked in pencil—there must be something beautiful in old age when desire has passed and one can sit back at peace and do all the interesting but unproductive things one has never had time to do before.

## *Wardheads*

I am now taking you over to Wardheads.

My very first registration of Wardheads was a farm sale there as a child and my recollection is of seas of mud and a cracked, three-legged potato-pot, which for some reason I was anxious to acquire; however, my nannie did not agree, so a small flaxen-haired

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child in a drooping kilt was pulled off into the foot-deep slime which surrounded the buildings. I have wondered recently how we children got on without gum-boots—the cleaning and putting on of many-buttoned gaiters must have been quite an undertaking.

The farm sale celebrated the end of Miss Murray's tenancy (she had come into money and was doubtless glad to clean her boots of Wardheads' mud for the last time).

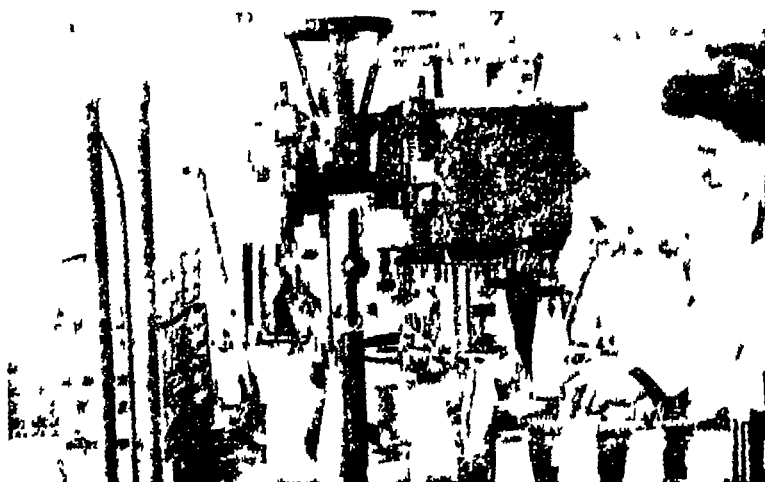
I suppose you would describe the old Wardheads as picturesque—a dangerous term when applied to farm-buildings. It had spacious thatched roofs, with sage-green cushions of moss on them and 200-year-old oaks overhanging and dripping, not only on but right through them. I can just remember the garden; there is a phrase—used when advertising small country houses—'a hunting-man's garden'. This phrase brings to my mind a rough grass enclosure surrounded by a broken fence, a subsoil of tins, a good sprinkling of dogs' messes, bones, and (somewhere in the foreground) a rusty Pennsylvania lawn mower, without a ledger blade, and a polo-stick half-embedded in the herbaceous border—if you abstract the polo-stick I think this will do for Miss Murray's garden.

The land was, and is, stoutish clay—but not exactly a cold, hopeless clay—a clay that will give good crops if everything is done in the right way at the right time. Thus to farm Wardheads the weather must play up. In the middle of the last century my grandfather replaced the brush drainage by tiles during a wave of agricultural optimism in which landlords thought the good old days were coming back; he held the rather pathetic hope that if they mortgaged up and improved the soil they would get the capital back in increased revenue. However, the various tenants kept the drains working and with estate help the ditches in a more or less reasonable condition. They had to—the only alternative was going around in boats—for remember we are flat—fifteen feet above sea-level in parts.

The new tenant (after Miss Murray) was a grand tenant, a great friend of the family and a very charming man—or men, for it was tenanted by Dalgetty Brothers, dealers in horses. Mr. Dalgetty devised a scheme that made the farm pay and that, from the landlord's point of view, is a very vital matter, nor did he worry the impoverished estate for elaborate repairs; he put the holding down to permanent grass and permanent timothy hay; he altered the steading round to



APRIL



THE DAIRY



THE CARPENTER'S SHOP

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box horses; he whitewashed the buildings and kept the garden so beautifully that passengers in the railway which splits the farm said constantly, 'That's the house I want to live in'.

Everything about Mr. Dalgetty was charming; he built a neat pigeon-house and kept a showy strain of short-faced tumbler; he regularly fed the trout in the burn running through the garden so that he only had to appear and they would start to splash about, boiling up the water; with the co-operation of the estate he put a verandah on the house and a large dining-room, which dotted all the i's and made the house very comfortable; there was never a wisp of straw in the yard and the mud disappeared. Mr. Dalgetty made a whole nineteen years' lease and most of another; his death was as the death of a near relation.

The permanent grass policy of the Dalgetty Brothers was right from their point of view because it paid—but there was a day of reckoning!

When Wardheads came into my hands we were not quite ready for it; we had not got a sufficient stock of home-bred dairy cows to make it a dairy farm, nor was I keen to buy any. When one has after years of work apparently bred out mastitis and T.B., one thinks a good bit before buying in the open market again. Until we were ready therefore I adopted the policy of least resistance, let the land as grazing grass and the house separately. The cottages were out-of-date but were quickly filled with families; I left them, rent free, to dwell therein as I had planned to rebuild the cottages and it seemed 'dog-in-the-mangerish' to keep the homeless out. We even put in water and a wash-house, etc. I know now that what I did was wrong, and also know what I should have done! I have had to pay for it over and over again. The correct procedure in a case like this is to forget the few pounds obtainable in annual rent, pull down the old cottages, put a good ploughman in the farmhouse, and fallow the whole farm; keep the man in his spare time hedging, ditching, subsoiling; in a year or so the weeds will be killed out, the old turf will rot, the wireworms fade away, and the drains clear themselves. In the few years of fallow the artificially manured, poisoned soil would regain its health, while one could rebuild the cottage and farm-buildings and start off with a first-class farm, ready to yield from scratch.

But life seems made up of a series of major mistakes with short and ephemeral good fortune—at least that is how I have found it. To under-

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stand my position you must know that the plan was building up all the time and Wardheads was eventually to be part of it. If I let the farm to another tenant it would be gone again for a considerable number of years, nor could I recover it without the payment of two years' rent for disturbance at the end of the lease and therefore I muddled through.

The cash—which might have gone to this reclamation—disappeared in claims and a lawsuit. As I said, the Dalgetty Brothers did not make out their second lease and some years had still to run. It so happened also that they had tenanted another farm belonging to me and during the slump had given it up. I am the world's worst business-man and when they said they found the farm unprofitable and wished to give it up before the end of the lease, it never occurred to me to claim anything off them or to make any equivocal agreement about the end of the Wardheads lease. The Dalgettys were old friends and naturally I said, 'So sorry you have to chuck it', and 'Of course, it will be all right'.

After the Dalgettys' death Wardheads was ranched for grazing until the lease ran out; it was then that I was to take over the farm but the Dalgettys' trustees claimed two years' rent for disturbance. This seemed to me unreasonable as the Dalgettys had been dead for some years, so obviously were not in a position to be disturbed. I fought the claim and won it in the local court but the trustees took it up to the Court of Sessions, where the first decision was rescinded. Law is by no means a cheap entertainment in Scotland; I worked out that the whole affair had been equivalent to three brand-new cottages!

The thatch on the steadying roof which Dalgetty Brothers had held in position by extreme skill and faith gave way and showered in on the rotting timbers below; we stacked lime in quantity inside and did not get it out on the fields to schedule; the lime expanded, pushing the walls out and lifting what remained of the granary floor; the drains after the long permanent-grass period chucked their hand in; wisps of snipe twisted in to the grey Scotch sky from stagnant pools. The tenant of the farmhouse had ideas about gardening, conflicting ideas which—after the flower-beds were all dug in—changed towards land-scaping; after a rustic bridge had been erected they changed again towards a herbaceous garden; finally the inspiration ceased, and with it the garden.

The free cottagers feeling that they lived a precarious day-to-day

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existence though it was hardly worth while cultivating their gardens or cutting the weeds; they established paths to their doors by treading down the undergrowth; they did not think it really necessary to do anything about the drains when they choked up—it was just one less amenity and one step nearer a completely nomad existence; I think that in the end, when the roofs fell in, they would have borrowed a few sheets of corrugated iron and kept the site warm with a lean-to against any wall that happened to be standing at the time.

Came the war!—as the old cinema captions used to say—and with the war a great upheaval of my little plan.

Coming of a family whose scarlet tunics sprinkle the dining-room ancestral portrait gallery, I rushed off to the army; later, tired of guarding bridges nobody seemed desirous of blowing up, I almost got to Finland; after this episode my enthusiasm for the army waned somewhat; forty-year-old subalterns were becoming a drug on the market; threats of depots and even records offices hung over my head; news from home did not sound reassuring; the plan seemed to be disintegrating; the most unlikely fields were getting ploughed up; key men were going. I went home to try and pick up the threads.

Wardheads was of course papered with ploughing-up orders; tangled masses of sickly-looking oats were already covering the heavy clay, their roots playing catch-as-catch-can with the wireworms in the unrotted sod. I know now that I made a mistake in ploughing up so much pasture so haphazardly—I should have fought the Agricultural Committee to the death. I could have produced more bulk and quantity by going slowly—but I did not; I even volunteered ground directly against the proper time schedule for my plan. The Wardheads Front became acute—in a stroke of the pen it had become a cereal ranch and a very bad cereal ranch at that. However, stock was building up. I pulled myself together and we hauled the remains of the thatch off the roof, slipped on our home-made concrete tiles, and put in a milking-bail. It was not feasible under war conditions to make a completely new cowshed and moreover we had the experience of another farm adapted under war conditions, in which we kept the cattle dehorned in a covered yard, bringing them into the milking parlour for cleaning and milking and turning the milked cows back into the yard. There was also another necessity—we had to make dung to bring a great part of the farm back into fertility; for although a number of fields were fat



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from the droppings of cake-fed bullocks (where the sickly tangled oats lay) a great part of the farm had been cropped continuously for a decade with timothy (now mostly couch) and it had received nothing more encouraging than a bag of ammonium sulphate as a crop maker. This land would not win back by artificials; it required great slabs of rich, well-made dung, filled with worms and bacteria; it required humus, it was dead land needing life.

If I have learned anything of agriculture from my years of mistakes (which I sometimes doubt) I have learned the almost incalculable harm nitrogenous fertilizers do the soil. Whether it is fish or crops, increased yield from snap methods has to be paid for in nature; yield must be built up through the years to make prosperity. Anyway, there were good reasons why the herd should be kept in a covered yard. A certain amount of prejudice exists against this manner of housing dairy cattle, because I imagine dairy cattle have been traditionally stalled in lines, and when a custom prevails in agriculture it is usually based on well-founded reasons. However, I have rather veered round to the belief that if one can keep them well enough bedded and can separate 'in season' cows and notorious fighters from the rest they do better this way than in stalls. I am inclined to think the original advantages were chiefly that it was easier and cleaner to milk the cows in a stall than loose in courts but that with the separate automatic bail this objection has fallen through.

The farmhouse had a serviceable bathroom, a good kitchen-range, and scullery facilities; I was able to add electricity before the war, so it became a good home for John Gardiner and his family.

It was more of a problem however to persuade my free tenants out of the other houses and to entice farm hands in, but as the war grew tougher I grew tougher also. Fortunately it never got to force, we persuaded our neighbours out without coming to blows, even parting good friends.

The Milne family took to one cottage and mercifully described it as grand and cosy; they fitted in, stock, family, and all, down to budgerigars, ferrets, and bees; they are a sort of complete farm on their own. They come out of the cottage in a human wave of solid force which is very inspiring.

The other family are not happy, nor do I blame them; the only apparently good thing about the house is that there is plenty of room

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but that is a disadvantage because it allows more square footage of damp to go through the walls, so the last piece of paper curls down to the floor before the next is pasted. Distemper mottles up in patches; our only hope lies in strapping the wall and putting asbestos cement panels on it. We are, at the time of writing, still waiting for the panels but the family are sticking it out. The pathetic side of the story is that they left their last house because they had endured it eight years and could not bear another minute in it; they came to us because, after inspection, they considered it a better house!

This may show a town reader how vital country housing is. We have got to go full out when the war is over, whether it is economical or not, and I for one am determined to put up houses a good bit in advance of what is 'thought to be necessary'. You can understand this when I tell you that fifty years ago the house I have just described was considered a model house.

We attacked the 'snipe field' and drained it. This knocked us back a cool five hundred and often seemed impossible to finish. We have had scattered drainers on the field next to it for the last six months and still not done. About this job hangs a story; a friend of mine—Brocket, of Caterpillars Tractors—rang up:

'I have just bought a tool for drainage; it scoops out trenches where you want them. Have you got a field we can try it in?'

'Sure—you're on!'

Mr. Brocket is a man who works to the tick so at exactly the scheduled hour the excavator started turning up a field on Wardheads. The machine itself I can best describe as a little less than the Forth Bridge and somewhat similar in appearance. I expect you have seen a new machine being tried out in a field; if you have not I must explain. Trails of onlookers tramp after it like seagulls following a plough; they shake their heads, pointing and whispering darkly to each other. There is, however, at least one spectator who is so overjoyed with the new machine that he runs beaming round it forecasting an incredibly optimistic future. Amongst the seagulls runs the inventor himself, covered with grease, occasionally jumping on the machine and altering things. Sometimes he stands back and looks pleased but his pleasure is short-lived; something starts going wrong and he is in again with a ratchet-spanner, piece of wire, or even the humble binder twine.

'Now the inventor of the 'Forth Bridge' is an artist; he just ebb

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enthusiasm in the most inspiring manner. I say he is an artist because, although he owns and runs a small factory, he wants to create good from it—tools which will turn the bog into potato fields or scar the purple moor with sheep drains.

‘Think of the acres of undrained land in Scotland a machine like this could put right,’ he exclaimed.

Later he declared:

‘I am out for improvement; we Scotch must get on; I want to invent the tools to get us on.’

I like the inventor and hope to see him again; a few more enthusiasts like this one would help a lot in post-war reconstruction; but then my heart always warms to the idealist, the artist, or the non-materialist.

The inventor’s dream of ditching the whole of Scotland appears to have considerable sense behind it, for the ‘Forth Bridge’, hauled by a D7 Caterpillar, scooped out all the necessary trenches to drain a twenty-acre field in less than a six-hour day; on the seventh hour we rested and surveyed the neatly trenched field.

‘There you are,’ said the inventor, and there certainly we were!

The next step was to get drainers, tiler, and skilled bottomers to finish the job. We got started that week with a good squad, but there is more in drainage than the initial trenching; the drain bottoms have to be carefully scooped, the bottoms cleared before the tiles can be laid. The first week went merrily forward but the second week saw earth falling off the sides and trenches filling with water. By the third week we had entered a battle fought with varying labour squads ranging from as many as twenty men down to two—the battle has been fought steadily forward from August until January.

The real point really about the ‘Forth Bridge’ equipment is that it would need a skilled squad of about fifty men working behind it steadily, with perhaps four or five lorries bringing in tiles and a bulldozer filling in behind. By such methods one might tile-drain thirty acres a day in possible drainage weather. With a shrewd contractor the organization would be possible and, in comparison with hand labour, the job would be cheaper. But of course there are difficulties to be aware of.

Inspired by the ‘Forth Bridge’ we are in process of working out a new idea and are arranging to have a small mechanized labour squad working at drainage on a continuous plan. This would seem practicable and

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could be made to fit in with the cropping and work of the various farms so that the worst terror of the heavy land farmer—drainage—would not only be conquered but maintained at top level. We are fitting an ordinary Fordson tractor with a small bulldozer and an excavating scoop towed behind. To keep up with its work we estimate that three men—four with the tractor-driver—would be sufficient. What the acreage covered per week would be I should not like to estimate, because I have never found drainage estimates work out very close, but we imagine it would be fairly fast and cheaper for us than any other method. However, we will find out.

My great-grandfather was a sailor; he finished up as an Admiral—by which title he has been known in the family ever since. He was more than something of a character and did a considerable amount of improvement about the place. The Admiral was a Captain during the Napoleonic Wars and he made up his mind that the country was not going to be short of sound oak on his account, so he caused as much hedgerow oak as he possibly could to be planted. I can visualize him in white breeches, swallow-tail coat, and wellingtons, pointing his malacca at the growing oaks:

'There, my son, there's a twenty-five gunner for you,' then with a twist of the body and a point upwards: 'See that branch, gunwale of a whaler, my boy.'

The Admiral would have done the Admiralty a good turn for this war (if steel hulls had not been invented); the trees have reached maturity at a time when the country is crying out for timber.

If I were given the choice however I would rather have the Admiral's Madeira (bought by the hogshead) than his oaks; getting them out and removing the roots has cost far more than the timber fetched, while the root removal has been a disheartening affair. I think we have tried every known method and none is satisfactory or economic. 'Keyhole Kate' has managed to haul some right out by the roots; we have then sawn the tree through and split the stump with black powder; sometimes they are too big for 'Kate' to handle and we have cut them and then blown the stump out with gelignite, using a colossal charge; again we have dug out the earth round the whole tree, drawn it out with 'Kate', and barrelled it to the side of the field. Another time we had a gyrop-tiller on the place at a season when it was not required for its normal function of tilling the soil; with this massive instrument we

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have tilled round the roots and pulled out the trees. In any case we have used the gyro-tiller to tear out the final remains of both roots and hedges, but this method is very costly as stoppages are frequent owing to bolts shearing; the gyro-tiller for this work is paid by time and, as we say in Scotland, 'The gyro-tiller is hard to pay'.

In order that you may understand the expense of this undertaking I must tell you that while we were paid sixty pounds for a parcel of standing oaks we spent seventy-odd on gelignite for blasting roots; over this there was labour, tractors, pay to the quarrymen, and numerous other expenses, besides a big fee for the gyro-tiller to grub out the suckers and remaining small roots.

Pioneering these days is an expensive hobby!

The firm who owned the gyro-tiller employed a very hard-working band of three to run it; we became, during its various visits to the place, considerable friends. The ringleader of the band, Williamson, has a stock of the most delightful similes and metaphors. Looking at a huge oak he will exclaim:

'Nae bother, it will go away like snow off a wall.'

His brother, another cheery member of the 'tiller-girls', as I called them, wore—for no particular reason—a schoolboy's blue cap with a school coat-of-arms in front; this gave the troupe a 'Will Hay' appearance, which I found diverting. Sometimes when the rain poured down and tilling became impossible we discussed life in the caravan. The school-cap Williamson—a man over thirty—was a Communist; that is he had adapted this doctrine to his own point of view, whereas his brother was an out-and-out individualist, whilst I believe in my own doctrine of 'let people be'. We had some splendid arguments interspersed with talks about sailing-boats and the sea in general, a common-ground topic on which we held much the same opinions. There is more root-tilling to be done at Megginch and I look forward to our caravan parties again.

The director of the company responsible for a group of these instruments arrived occasionally in his car and he and I used to have amusing arguments as to whether tilling in the ordinary way is really any good at all. I remember the start of one of these arguments, which was really the curtain-raiser to a bargain for price.

He: 'This machine cost (so-much); its running expenses are (so-and-so); then each tiller-blade costs (so many) pounds.'

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I: 'Do you mean to say you are spending all that money to ruin every field in Scotland?'

And so it went on.

A line of trees running from our 'carriage drive to the farm buildings forms part of an avenue which continues across the railway to a strip of trees called the Alley. Originally the line went much further but the Admiral in a tidy-up campaign shortened it to improve the next-door farm. The arrival of the railway split the avenue in half, making it useless. The 'bit' of avenue over the railway left a nasty little cocked-hat field, while the avenue itself, thirty-five feet wide, had grown up in thick thorn bushes and other cover with a winding path running through; apart from this avenue the ground was cut about by winding ditches and the Admiral's Victory Oaks. We have now managed to clear the whole lot out and so can keep the whole farm in a state of rotational cropping, all easily accessible from one road running alongside the railway line and accessible from the farm by a level crossing and a 'creep' under the railway a little further on. The only blot is an isolated cottage—a relic of feudal days when the property was divided out in smallholdings with common grazing rights and God knows what. The old family letters give a vivid picture of the period of which I tried to give an outline sketch in the chapter about Inchconans.

Robert, who came before the Admiral and put up some wonderfully built houses, made the sort of mistake we—as a country—are always making. He did not clean up the whole of the old system and start in on the new, but left bits of it sticking out. Many of the old feudal holdings were left where they were, remodelled and brought up to date in order to fit in with the new system of tenant farming. The cottage in Wardheads field is an example of this—a nuisance to the running of the farm and a nuisance to the people who live in it; they have to squelch across the winter Carse mud to reach it and cannot get the baker's van, etc., anywhere near. If you live through a Scottish winter this means more than you might suppose; so as soon as the new houses go up I shall blitz the cottage before anybody else can get in! I did this to another smallholding cottage some miles away on the hill; it was the complete example of the rural slum, built so that it did not face the south, with a steep bank behind it running up to an artificially constructed mill lade. The rats of course made holes in the

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lade and the water-came shooting down into the house. The cottage itself consisted of two dark wet rooms and a thatched roof; a lean-to shed of mouldering wood on the back wall—towards the stream—housed a couple of pigs, a cow, and perhaps three calves. For water one went up to the burn. There was about ten acres of ground, or not so much—nobody ever knew, because it was covered with islands of rock outcrop overgrown thickly with gorse broom. In the spring, when the old apple-tree in the garden was in flower and the broom out, the thatched cottage and its surroundings got pretty near the dream of the Victorian water-colour artist. But I knew the rot that lay under the Birket Foster exterior; in its last days a friend of mine lived there—he had come down a bit and had a very large, three-quarter-grown family. They did not complain, and eventually when he got a better house the two damp, dark rooms became vacant. I whipped the roof off but within a week of his leaving I had applications from eight would-be new tenants—just consider what that means.

Back to Wardheads again and over to the other side of the railway there is a thirty-acre field adjoining the steading. Now three-quarters of this field is the remains of the timothy hay *plus* artificial nitrogen policy and is only just beginning to show signs of fertility; the other quarter was too long in permanent grass with bullock-fed cattle and still needs a crop or two before it will get the texture and feel of good arable cum short lea soil. We have not solved the drainage problem; as a sort of overture and lucky dip we cleaned out the ditches, in which sizeable thorns were growing, and opened up the leading drains, but I am afraid the laterals have not cleared themselves and, before things can be as they should, the whole field will have to be redrained.

The remaining part of the old avenue runs to the farm from the carriage drive and in it are some fine old beech-trees. It is definitely attractive and fits in well with the proposed layout of the farm. I have set my children or guests on to plant bulbs up the sides and already the spring daffodils show off the old beeches.

Between this wee avenue and the Pow of Errol there is another foolscap-shaped field; this we are leaving permanently in grass. It is very handy to turn stock out on, has a good sole of clover, and is, in size, below the ten-acre standard field I aim at. Across the Pow there is a difficult strip, which is now half orchard, and is to be all orchard when good trees become available. We will have a look at other orchards

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later on, so let us consider the remaining field of the farm—the seventeen-acre field which runs beside the 'Policy Dyke'. (A park in Scotland is known as a policy and a dyke is a wall in quite a number of districts.) This field was too long in permanent grass; it was a mass of thistles and we are gradually bringing it round, but it has not reached the texture and feel of good land yet. Half-way up this field near the railway there was a spinney of perhaps half an acre planted by my grandfather. Why he planted it I have never been able to understand nor the reason for its peculiar shape.

My grandfather drew and painted as a hobby; he had an original and attractive style. Unfortunately he would make his own paints and most of his colour has gone wrong. I never saw him. He was at Sandhurst in Waterloo year. He had a big local reputation, which still lingered when I was a boy. What the reputation was exactly it would be hard to say, but it was a kindly one. Old Tyrie, the joiner, told me:

'I saw yer grandfather wi' his own hands ploughing up the orchard.'

What was remarkable about that I did not gather until years after when I found that any form of manual labour was considered lowering to Victorian gentry.

Sandy Black, who remained under-gardener for fifty years, and spoke a Scotch so broad and so filled with disused words that I doubt whether Sir Walter Scott himself could have understood him, had this anecdote:

'I seen him gieing an old wife in the ditch a fill for her pipe.'

This, again, to my mind, does not seem that much out of the ordinary except that I have recently seen few old wives sitting tobaccoless in ditches.

But the story which really made me think he had 'got something' happened during the time when banks everywhere were bursting. Picture a huge crowd of farmers storming the Perth Bank in no uncertain manner, and my grandfather (six foot three and striking-looking) wedging his way up the bank steps. A pause—then an angry voice:

'There ye are; there's Megginch going tae draw his siller out—the bank's awa'.'

My grandfather: 'I am not taking money out—I have come to put money in.' He managed to stop the run and saved the bank. I have the letter thanking him and saying that the bank had put a hundred pounds to his credit as a token of their regard.

I do hope, however, that he did not use the money to plant the little



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wood on Wardheads because it cost much more to take out and—just as we got the last stump out the pylons moved in! During the moving of the pylons I felt rather like a Chinaman who knows nothing of the outside world; suddenly bombs drop in his field and smash the hand-planted wheat:

‘It is the war,’ he says. In the same rather irritable voice he says, ‘It is the flood’, or ‘It is the plague’, but still he does not know who fights whom, or if the men who drive through are Japs or Chinamen from a different province.

‘It was the war’ over the pylons. Just as the seventy-acre field at Inchconans was looking its best lorries drove through it, throwing out bits of pylon amongst the emerald shoots of bursting grain. Later, men, cars, lorries, spreadeagled the field. I talked to a bowler-hatted overseer (there was no bowler-hat but the term is indicative of class):

‘All this about digging for victory?’ I queried.

‘You’ll get full compensation.’

‘Yes, I suppose so, but it’s not the money side, it’s the waste; I cannot bear waste, crops are living things to me, like wild flowers and . . .’

I could see he was not interested so told him a blue-pencil story at which he laughed and went my way.

As the last stump went out of my grandfather’s mystery spinney the pylon started to build up. However, the pylons used to span the field on the other side of the railway and their removal has made that field as near perfection, from the obstacle point of view, as one is ever likely to come to in farming. Pylons in the middle of a field are hell; one never gets the patches below them properly cultivated and when the crop grows they are inaccessible and consequently spread weeds. The Government pays us a pound a year; I would raise them a quid to have them off the place!

Invasion poles are, on the whole, worse; we had a marvellous crop of these; I was very Chinese about them; I could never get the idea. For instance, our best field of ninety-eight acres, described as the Hundred-Acre Field, had none, whilst a seven-acre field, seventy-eight yards away, had four—one of the four through the main leading drain which has never been quite the same since.

The field we were at by the Policy Dyke at Wardheads is seventeen-odd acres; to make it into twenty acres (two of my standard fields)

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only meant moving the fence a few yards into the next farm, which could spare the lost acreage, thus making the total arable acreage of Wardheads into fifteen ten-acre fields—the exact size of farm I aim at for my plan. The maddening thing is, I could have moved the fence between harvest and ploughing but thought other work more important; in the interim the war descended and posts for some new scheme shot along the edge of the field, so the fence remains immovable until the end of the war.

A new hash of pylons is just descending on the farm as I write, and these are to remain; so Wardheads will finally look more like a bird-cage than a farm.

The garden is coming back to its former glory for John who manages the farm is keen on flowers.

‘Those flowers look nice,’ somebody remarked as we passed. ‘Who is the gardener?’

‘Gardiner,’ I answered.

It was one of those name coincidences that crop up occasionally. Errol Holmes, the cricketer, told me of a searchlight he was inspecting and found the reflector filthy.

‘What’s your name?’ he asked the private responsible for its cleaning.

‘Lampshine, sir.’

That bowled Errol middle-stump. It is actually the best name coincidence I have heard of.

To complete the farm buildings and get them to the standard at which I am aiming for the holdings of the group we require a Dutch barn and a piggery, two new cottages, the roads made good, and the orchard replanted. But the end is in sight. For staff, implements, horses, and stock we are up to standard and we have a very good staff. We have also achieved the standard herd of pedigree tuberculin-tested Ayrshires; calves and young stock play about in their pens; a pair of Clydesdales and an odd horse are working satisfactorily and a tractor and implements are disposed of in a good implement shed. One can see the farm beginning to smile back at one in a reassuring manner; the worst seems to be over; as the rotation goes round and the fields receive more and more dung, as the temporary leys are ploughed in, so will the farm begin to smile more and more until I hope one day to see it actually laugh.

## OF THE EARTH EARTHY

### *The Kingdom*

WE have been to Wardheads, The Myres, Balcallum, Balmrye, Oldwood, and Inchconans, but before leaving the subject of the satellite farms I think we should take a tour round 'The Kingdom'. Why it is called thus I have not the faintest idea, though I have tried several times to find out.

The Kingdom has had a variegated history because it was for a long time 'the Home Farm', meaning that the Admiral and my grandfather ran it with mixed success, as the accounts show.

At the height of the Admiral's régime it must have been a show place; he took special care to make the buildings modern and artistic; he smashed up one of the old feudal hovels and built a massive cottage of stone, with carefully hewn facings and thatched roof. I suppose, in the 'thirties, it was *dernier cri*, but now it is merely a nuisance, for it is difficult to bring up-to-date without altering the design too much, or being too lavish and building in stone, instead of brick, so we have just dabbled at it until we can get something better; these rough-and-ready attempts at making it comfortable were supposed to be temporary, but the war came and the cottage is still out-of-date, although inhabited.

The Admiral was definitely not a farmer; he had not much chance certainly, as he began his apprenticeship to the sea at the age of eight. An old letter tells of his initiation to the Navy, of how he arrived on his brother-in-law's ship, where he was to start his training—in a blue silk suit (his best, I take it). Lord Harvey (his brother-in-law), the captain of the frigate, thought Adam foppish and so threw him into the water. There were several rather heated letters about the incident from Adam's mother.

After a long and distinguished career the Admiral—by this time an old man—settled down at Megginch and started to make it 'ship-shape'. He took up the threads left by Robert but he did not know anything about farming. On The Kingdom he got the idea that a little landscape gardening would add to the amenities; the fields were already covered with isolated trees, remnants of the feudal small-holdings, and the Admiral augmented these by boldly splashing in clumps. I must admit that these clumps achieved the effect he wanted;

## THE KINGDOM

there is a point at the lodge where from rising ground one gets a glimpse of the Sidlaw Hills, and the isolated trees and the Admiral's clumps gave a pleasing foreground to the picture; but the sixty-acre field on the other side of the drive was merely ruined by the clumps which landscaped nothing and were simply ugly. Robert had good taste in everything he did but the Admiral just missed it. The taking out of the clumps and isolated trees was laborious and very expensive but we got them all out in the end.

In one clump lurked the remains of a feudal smallholding—a buried-treasure legend went with it. I used this legend to encourage the various people who yanked out the old stones, and they dug with zeal, for the legend said that the last inhabitant had buried a bag of gold. In the spring, when we are often trying to catch up, I get everybody available to drive the tractors during dinner-and tea-time; once it so happened that my turn came to plough near the old cottage, I looked expectantly behind every time I went over the old site, but the bag of gold has not yet come to light. There just might be a grain of truth in the story for Sandy Black, digging a drain near the place, found a silver George III coin. 'They never had our Bonnie Charlie's heid on them,' he remarked. Sentiment dies hard in the North.

The farm-buildings and the farmhouse were built long before the Admiral's day. Although the farm-steading was rather shaky about the roof it was a good building, while the house has only needed a bath and electric light to make it first-class; it has, too, a very good garden.

Billy Bell lives in the house; he is an attachment to the McGginch family, having come in when I married. He taught my wife, Violet, to ride as a child, and is consequently a lifelong friend of hers. Billy knows the wide world—apart from being a sergeant-major in the last war and riding his way to Salonica, he has been around in this country. He is not the sort of person who gets easily stumped. Years ago we had a horse running somewhere and I gave Billy the money for his entrance; he looked at me in amazement, explaining that for these occasions he merely carried a curry comb, brush, and a horse-rug over his arm, a ruse which I found got him in free everywhere, even through the gates of the Royal Show.

When The Kingdom caught fire it was Billy who galloped up to the house to give the alarm. I sleep in the garden and was first up; having

## OF THE EARTH EARTHY

found out the stock was safe, I remembered I had not raised the insurance, although not many months before the agent had advised me to do so. 'These old thatched buildings all go in the end, and when they go, they go!' he had said.

Thus The Kingdom fire was not such a blessing as a farm fire usually is to a landlord. My! And how The Kingdom burned! Fortunately we got it out before it reached the old house. We replaced the thatch with our concrete tiles and were, in those days, able to get asbestos cement rhones and water conductors, an improvement on the old cast-iron ones, as they do not rust though they break too easily.

Mrs. Bell and Billy are great animal lovers. For years we had a flock of Shetland sheep; and as lambs often need fostering, The Kingdom has frequently had a tame sheep wandering around it. The last one, Bambi by name, grew large and woolly and tamer than anything I have ever seen in the sheep line—unless it was Judy, the one before Bambi, or Rosa, the one before Judy. Bambi always followed Billy up to Megginch when occasion brought him there and used to dive through the back door into the kitchen. Sheep are not so unoriginal or unintelligent as people imagine!

Besides Bambi, the Bell family have had a succession of rather attractive and well-looked-after dogs; there is also usually something in the way of a parrot or macaw around the Bell lot.

The farm manager of The Kingdom is Alec Cargill. He is a sort of super-worker and extremely efficient; everything must be right with Cargill or there's trouble. He is not the sort of man who would, at the end of the hay season, shove the mower uncoiled, with the frame broken, into a shed and only remember that it was broken on the day the next year's crop started. Cargill would have it up to the blacksmith and be at me every day until it was mended and put right; he would stand no nonsense from us nor be sidetracked by our assurance that it would be mended in the winter.

The Kingdom is slightly differently planned from the other farms because it has—in addition to the arable land—the only permanent grazing of the whole place attached to it; this is the park in front of the house.

I must tell you why I have broken my plan to the extent of letting the park stay in permanent grazing. First, it is dotted all over with very large trees and you may have gathered by now that I know some-



OUR FIRST FIRST FOR COWS



SUNSHINE CHAMPION AT ROYAL



TOM LOGIE, WITH MONKSIE, A TAME FOX

## THE KINGDOM

thing about removing large trees; the expense of clearing the park would be very great. Secondly, the grazing is itself quite good, while it is the only really sheltered field we have for wintering young stock. Thirdly, there is another restraining influence—I am not certain that we are altogether right about temporary pasture, although I have based my own plan on it.

The advantages of temporary grass are more than obvious. Forty years ago Elliot gave the *pros* and *cons* for the temporary grass system. He covered all the points, which are now branded about in agricultural circles as 'new thoughts', in full. Elliot was a sound man. He took into his own hands the most unprofitable farm on his property and made it pay, by using rotational leys with seed mixtures containing deep-rooted herbs. Although a new and excellent edition of his book has recently been published, the original work must have been well read by the intelligent farming public years ago. 'The intelligent farming public' are no fools, they must be up-to-date and—contrary to general belief—they *are* very up-to-date; yet, for some reason, the 'Clifton Park System of Farming' found few adherents. There were of course districts which had practised temporary leys for years before Elliot was heard of; they went on practising these rotations but the book did not produce a new rush of 'temporary ley farmers'. During the various eras when ensilage has become fashionable, many farmers have put up silos, for they, like everybody else, are influenced considerably by fashion. The rush into combining and pick-up baling is another example of massed fashion influence, yet Elliot's system did not move them. Why? It is a very wise book and has inspired some of our leading agricultural professors, but it did not move farming opinion. Why? It is the 'why' which makes me leave the park in permanent pasture, as a control for our new temporary leys; I believe that if I go about with my eyes open, comparing the two, I shall arrive at a better understanding of the subject—maybe find the 'why'.

I have, however, planned The Kingdom larger than my standard 150 acres, for I do not believe that permanent pasture will give the same quantity of herbage as temporary ley. It was in this park that the Shetland sheep lived.

My brother-in-law is an uncanny judge of stock. I have never seen a better judge of sheep or hounds than Jock. He built up a sheep flock from selected Island stock and introduced crosses of Dorset Horn.



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You have only to ask him for anything and it's yours: when therefore we took a fancy to his Shetlands he immediately selected some for us to start up a flock. We kept the flock fairly steady—at about fifty sheep. Before the war they were useful as they are of a size which a household can handle and are, moreover, excellent mutton. We used to send the wool to Provost Haggart of Aberfeldy, who runs the best tweed mill I know. He made it up into cloth and so the whole family appeared in brown jackets, skirts, or overcoats! The same thing happened to Jock's tweed, thus our circle of relations and friends were, more or less, trade-marked.

It is said that merino is a better wool and I have no doubt that it is true, but I know no finer stuff for a rough country coat than Shetland; apart from its silky texture and softness it seems to contain an oil which is particularly damp-resisting.

When Jock introduced these sheep his farm manager happened to be an Orcadian, so Jock asked if he thought that Dumfriesshire pasture would be good enough for the sheep.

'In some of the islands,' Davey said, 'they put big walls round.'

'Oh!' Jock answered, 'to keep the sheep in?'

'No. To keep them on the beach; they feed on the seaweed at low tide and the walls keep them from getting at the good grass which is kept for the cattle.'

It is said that the quality of the wool is obtained from some property of the seaweed, possibly iodine, but whether this is true or legendary I have not the remotest idea.

With the introduction of clothing coupons and meat rationing the purpose of the flock was lost and we decided to liquidate them but we hope to start up again in happier days.

The Kingdom is now cleared of stray obstacles with the exception of the isolated cottage I mentioned. We have even managed to mend the road; I think I can say it is now a 'standard farm', but no one will ever realize the agony of getting it right. If you could only have seen it as I did as a boy, in the days when old John Stewart was tenant. For a start the road was impassable—no one even tried to use it. Then the mess round the buildings was quite indescribable. Mr. Stewart himself was a very hard-working farmer and the straightest man to deal with you could ever know; he was a Highlander and his handshake was his bond. No other agreement with John was necessary; in any case I am

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not sure that he could read. He did not just work, he slaved, and he was a man getting on in years.

Tommy, John Stewart's son, was a wee bit touched and, consequently, of little help. The rest of the family had made good in far-away places. Old Mrs. Stewart, with 'the Lassie', worked harder than a slave in a salt mine. The Lassie was a constantly changing factor in the household, she was 'fee'd' once a year at the market in somewhat similar fashion to the purchase of stock; her duties were defined at the time of her engagement and covered every task a woman is capable of undertaking on a farm. The Lassie had to be strong, with a fertility figure; she also had to be willing; I do not think anybody worried much about days off or holidays, but hard work, porridge, and plenty of milk produced a matrix which turned out real men—pioneers of toughness and daring who were not afraid to venture into the Canadian prairie or the backblocks of Australia and to found nations of extreme endurance. One had to take a deep breath before going into the house—I think it was something to do with the cheeses! The sea of mud which surrounded the farm penetrated the house, and so did the livestock. People laugh at the idea of hens and pigs in a house, but they laugh without understanding rough farming. If you're always under-staffed and always trying to do the impossible to catch up, you don't have time to worry about niceties; farm animals soon become domesticated. It is too much trouble to keep them out. It is *so easy* to go native and terribly difficult to get out of the rut again.

Mr. Stewart completed a couple of nineteen years' leases and was well on into another. He had known my father as a boy; they had grown up together, were great friends, and would do anything for each other. One does not get people like Old John nowadays; when his first lease expired he came up to see my father; they had a crack together, a drink, a handshake, and that was the new lease! They never had a disagreement of any kind. They had, of course, much in common—were keen curlers and the like. I don't suppose John Stewart or my father ever missed going to church—both top-hatted and black-coated—William, our coachman in livery, rattling the pair up the waterbound road and John in his trap, with Mrs. Stewart complete with bonnet, clopping up to the kirk, scrunching round the gravel at the church door.

I remember vividly a little incident about old Stewart. He kept a succession of collie dogs with the family name of Rover. The Rover of

## OF THE EARTH EARTHY

my childhood had grown up with John, from puppyhood to doghood and to old age; I think he was really too old to do much work and a lot of John's other animal friends were the same way. Now Rover had, ever since his puppy days, received a weekly gift of bull's-eyes (striped ba's, in Scotch). The sweeties were given every Friday on return from market. When the pony was not ill Rover would wait at the roadside for John's return and when the pony was ill, he would go down to the station to meet his master. One day my sister Victoria met a sad procession coming up from the railway; in front, Mr. Stewart, back bent, trudging along with his stick; twenty yards behind, Rover, walking listlessly. When John stopped to doff his bonnet to Victoria, Rover stopped and looked the other way. John had forgotten the doggie's sweeties! Perhaps this story may give you a picture of a Scotland that's gone and an inkling into this farmer's character. Victoria told me that John was almost in tears and could only say, 'He'll never trust me again'. It seems now almost impossible that one ever lived in those days.

There is something too that I cannot understand. There were no tractors or cars or gadgets; I do not suppose Old John ever hired the steam threshing mill; he would blindfold and yoke his horses in the horse mill and keep them turning, threshing out stack after stack. Yet the farms in the district went on just the same as they do now, when everyone has tractors and either self-contained mills or hired ones. John would rather have died than work on the Sabbath, yet now—every harvest—the whole district is out in the field, Sunday after Sunday. I think we would say that Stewart's farm was under-staffed but he got through year after year for over fifty years. Something has happened to time, surely.

Where did John get the leisure to go into market every Friday, driving in with horse and trap, when farmers now have just time to rush in and out in fast cars. The old records show that in the frosty weather curling went on for weeks and everybody who could walk was on the ice. The farms have not suddenly grown larger; the land has not become heavier. What has happened? Why, with all this mass of mechanization, have we now less time? Is time an illusion? When one is a child, a day seems endless—does it mean we are growing up? Or is it that they had complete faith in everything working out smoothly, according to plan, and we have no faith in anything?

## Part Four

# Animal and Vegetable

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### *Cows*

**W**e always had cows; from the time I can remember anything I remember cows. They lived—when I was young—in the byre, a venerable structure several hundred years old, designed, I presume, according to the latest fashion of those days and substantially built to last several hundred years.

From the construction of the byre it would seem that the fashion then was to keep cows in the dark, as far as possible, for there was only one window and this was placed so that no light could reach the cows; there was a door at each side, for convenience in bringing in food and taking out milk, but no other ventilation, and as a whistling draught blew past the cows' udders when the doors were open, they were kept shut.

In my youth the cows were kept very clean, with the straw neatly tidied away from the gutter and the walls regularly whitewashed, so that there was enough reflected light to milk by. When I was seven years old there were about six cows; I knew two personally—Cherry Blossom and Juniper Whitelegs.

All the cows had their names painted on metal plates hung over their particular stalls. Cherry Blossom was a gross white Ayrshire with very large horns, while Juniper Whitelegs was of Channel Island extraction with one crumpled horn. I was not allowed near her because she kicked like a mule and had butting habits when loose; I remember seeing her kick a full bucket of milk over and believe it was a habit to which she was addicted but nobody seemed to check her or get a strap to tie her legs together.

Cherry Blossom was very docile. I have even ridden her and she taught me how to milk. She was of advanced years.

## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

Margaret the dairymaid, very clean in a white apron, carried the milk up to the dairy. It was not cooled. Looking back I feel that some of the cows were tubercular; there was a sort of Shorthorn thing—whose name I can't remember—who, I am sure now, was riddled with T.B., and I expect Cherry Blossom was also; as I have said, the milk was not cooled, yet we all thrived on it and drank a lot.

The old dairy in those days was a good sight; the cream room had stone shelves and blue delft-tiled walls; around the shelves were large brown glazed bowls of milk ready for skimming; on a shelf was a glass spoon and one could (if one got in) crinkle up the yellow cream and gulp it down; nothing has ever tasted quite so good. There were crocks of cream awaiting churning, but this had not the supreme flavour of the newly formed cream on the bowls.

I often remembered the days of the dairy and the rich cream, the blue tiles and the starched milkmaid, when I saw the old system crack up with the last war. One does not notice a system cracking up when one lives in it; things happen gradually; a window breaks and gets stuffed with a sack, there is no dairymaid and it becomes simpler to carry the milk into the house; there is nobody to make butter and the dairy becomes unnecessary—but one sees the decay vividly if one returns at intervals. Thus each time I came home on leave things were a little worse; finally, much worse. Nobody cared any more what happened; the age-old system had gone and nothing took its place. A couple of dirty cows stood under the gilded name-plates, and old Duncan Robertson had so much to do he had hardly time to milk.

I have often wondered during this war if I shall see the same crack-up of my system, the breaking-up of customs hard to establish, without replacement by anything else, the general slackening off and slurring over of little jobs. There is one thing about such a breakdown; eventually—when nobody cares any more—a curious peace descends; the old ordered way of doing things has gone and not been replaced; there is no longer any need to do anything 'fancy'; there is far too much to do ever to be done; the incentive to try any more has gone; after the pangs and aches of the revolution have worn off this strange peace descends. The swallows fly in and out from their nests in the deserted buildings, the weeds grow unchecked, but into this life comes a soothing feeling, a realization that nothing really matters very much, that the world is—after all—a speck in nothingness, that man has but a

## COWS

short time to live, and with this philosophy comes a strange quiet, a quiet in which there is simplicity and laughter.

So I say, I have seen all this and I know how it happens. Many countries may go native after the war because the inhabitants may be too tired to do anything—prepared to drift without thought of tomorrow, to laze away until strong men arise again and wipe them out.

I was the strong man. I descended on the Sleeping Beauty's castle with the determination to wake it up, to finish with the old system and start up a new one, not to give in or be beaten but to blow up a flame in the ashes.

We cleared out the last of the old cows and turned the byre into a workshop; we bought more cows from reliable dairy farmers, choosing them because they were healthy, more than for any other point; the herds from which these cows came had long been recorded and tuberculin-tested. I had the idea that these cows might be the foundation of the new herds. Billy Bell looked after this trio—Betty, Babs, and Ena—on another farm. He gave them what they wanted to eat and they lived in a very old cowshed, much as they pleased. They used to pull trusses of hay from the overflowing racks and toss it about so that it was no uncommon sight to go into the byre and find the cows almost completely covered with hay.

We joined a milk recording society, although this seemed a strange thing to do with only three cows; however, the milk recorder arrived at monthly intervals and patiently recorded Betty, Babs, and Ena. My idea in milk recording was to start the herd with as good a nucleus as possible; even though it appeared a joke and quite ridiculous at the time, it seemed the best way of finding out what we were doing, otherwise we should be building up our herds in the dark and possibly making early mistakes which might take years to eradicate.

We got a surprise with the three cows and had a splash of that rare thing, beginner's luck.

Betty gave eleven hundred gallons at over four per cent butterfat, Babs nearly thirteen hundred gallons, and Ena, whom we thought useless, gave over eight hundred at four per cent. Our herds to-day are full of descendants of these cows, especially Babs.

Betty, when we reached the milking-machine stage, took a strong dislike to it and then refused to return to hand-milking, so her blood is not deeply stamped into the herd.

## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

From these three cows we built up a herd in step with the development of the farmland; later on, when the land started getting ahead of the herd, we increased the stock from outside. The first of this draft was Slodahill Margaret II, and she proved a wonderful investment and matrix for many good cows. Margaret has never had a day's sickness; when we brought in mastitis Margaret kept clear. At fourteen she had left the serious herd and was rearing calves; she reared four at once! In 1937 she was the thirteenth-best cow in Scotland, with a yield of fifteen hundred and twenty gallons, at 4.20 per cent butterfat in fifty-one weeks. At sixteen she is still alive and happy.

After Margaret we bought nine heifers from the best herds in Dumfriesshire and Ayrshire and they all proved smashers. We managed also to get two heifers from Colonel Butters's herd of Ayrshires at Cluniemore, a herd which was at that time the best in Scotland, and they proved magnificent animals.

And then I made a mistake. There was a very famous cow in those days which had given over two thousand gallons during three successive lactations at a reasonable butterfat percentage; from this cow we bought a bull and a heifer calf and, through them, we introduced mastitis into the herd, a disease which has taken years of careful work to stamp out. If I had only stopped buying in sooner! How often have I regretted that!

Since 1936 we have bought no cows into the herd although we have, of course, purchased a good many bulls. These, with one exception, have been successful. The exception was a very good bull from a very good herd (and, needless to say, very expensive for those days), and this bull had the factor of producing bulldog calves. This is not so troublesome as mastitis as you can only produce such a calf by a cross with a cow which also carries the bulldog factor; moreover, when we tumbled to it, the damage had not gone very far; however, it meant a lot of scrapping to get this element out of the herd. Eventually we hope to reach the stage when we shall not even have to introduce bulls to our herds—they will be far enough off in relationship to draft bulls off each other.

A large dairy herd to-day free from tuberculosis, mastitis, or contagious abortion is a priceless possession, a creation which cannot be reproduced again without twenty years of careful breeding. The value of such a herd cannot be expressed in terms of money, for to create such

## COWS

a herd in these days of widespread diseases may be an impossibility. There are, of course, a number of such herds throughout the country, and stock from them can sometimes be acquired, but I do not think it would be possible to go out and pick up a herd of several hundred animals straightaway free from these serious troubles.

We of course have culled drastically from T.B., mastitis, and any hereditary disease and we have now formed the nucleus of the breeding stock for all the herds of my plan. To do this we have had to rob the young stock of each herd successively, young stock which should have been there for the improvement of the herd; but the important thing was to get the place stocked first and cull for quality afterwards, for until a farm is stocked it need not hope for improvement; once the cycle has been set in motion of crops, stock grazing, and the plough fertility build up, so that the farm can increase its load of stock gradually to capacity. While the feeding on the farm increases the ground becomes rich and the herd puts on bloom.

In order to get the different farms stocked with animals of our own breeding, which we know are likely to be free from disease, we have deliberately sacrificed quality, have allowed the five hundred-gallon cow to remain in the herd and drag down the average. As I write, however, the bones of five herds are all there—they need be robbed no longer—we can start culling the moderate cows and building up for our ideal herd. I have fixed, in my mind, the ideal average of a herd at eight hundred gallons, four per cent butterfat. I do not aim to try and force-feed record-breaking cows; I want health and a thrifty cow that will be tough and convert her feeding economically. I would sacrifice very heavy milk yield for other points in order, for example, to breed out a savage strain of cow—an animal such as Missie, who charged anyone on sight in a field and waited her chance to go for you whenever possible; in the cowshed she spent her spare time goring the rest of the herd—yet Missie was a good cow but had this tough streak running through her family.

Again, I don't want a strain of difficult milkers—a cow like Meg, who refused to let down her milk in a reasonable time. And again, I want to maintain butterfat—a cow which gives over two thousand gallons of two-per-cent milk should not be praised but shot—it would save trouble to use a tap!

If one aims at these additional qualities one must sacrifice high yield



## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

to a certain extent; it cannot be made the sole aim of the breeding programme. Thus my aims are not very ambitious for it is little use trying for the impossible where breeding animals is concerned. Sometimes the impossible happens, but it is safer to keep it as a lucky chance than as a definite aim. I would love of course to breed a herd of 'Ovations', for Ovation is my ideal cow; for seven short lactations Ovation averaged over the thousand gallons at very high butterfat; she was amazingly healthy and a lovely-looking cow, which is exceptional, for the show type of cow is often a wicked milker. By and large, three hundred Ovations would suit me well enough!

The war is a good show-up for unthrifty cows. When high protein meal was plentiful all cows did moderately well, some excellently, but the really bad cow managed to get along well enough to be economic. Under wartime rationing the different cows indicate their real capacity; some run to fat, some milk a few weeks and dry up, some will not milk at all; but the best animals do not allow the feeding to make any difference—these are the ones to hang on to until they die, the ones whose progeny should be the herd of to-morrow.

A number of writers say that the high-protein feeding of the old days was responsible for a great deal of our troubles with mastitis and other disease and the wartime feeding is really much better for the stock. This, in my opinion, is only partly true. The bad cow, on the old menu, would probably run to fat and, consequently open herself to innumerable troubles. While the many cows throughout the country who suffer from hereditary diseases would still have these diseases, whatever the feeding, the good cow who converts her food into milk came to no harm on a rich diet.

There seems every advantage in supplementing our home-grown feeding-stuffs with imported protein, when we have the chance to do it again. Most of our stock troubles, I believe, come from improper methods of agriculture. In a state of nature herds would roam hither and thither throughout the country, allowing pastures time to recoup themselves; when kept constantly in one place they would dry up the life-giving substances an animal draws from the soil and from the herbage. Sheep, for instance, after years on a hillside use up the microscopic amounts of copper necessary for their health and develop a deficiency disease called swayback. We have, in the past, tried to counteract these mineral deficiencies by giving stock the necessary

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minerals in crude form, but this is merely putting one's finger on the leak, without trying to get a new pipe! In a natural state a ewe would move to fresh ground. It seems to me, therefore, that we are doing something wrong with our husbandry and that is where the disease is coming from.

Mineral deficiencies are not only occurring in stock but in plants also—that takes us back another step and, again, we are up against a barrier. Our knowledge is so incomplete we can only cure black rot in sugar-beet by adding crude boron to the soil. In some way, it seems to me, we are attacking the subject from the wrong angle. We have a danger signal hanging out that says, 'You are doing something wrong'. In some way we are upsetting the balance—we notice the signs of our mistakes in our stock and plants, we have been able to pick out the most traceable mineral deficiency which is running through our whole life-cycle, from soil to human beings, but I believe we are doing more than that—we are killing off an *X* factor as yet indescribable. Men like Sir Albert Howard see that it is there but it still remains a nebulous quality—a relationship of health, which passes through the complete life-cycle in the same way minerals do, is in some way being lost. If what I believe is in any way correct, the mere selection of disease-free cows or resistant plants will not be enough; the doping of animals or the spraying of our plants will only hold disaster back. We must do more than that. At the moment I pin my faith on the long rotation, the turning-in of the pasture, the use of large quantities of stock and dung, the cutting out of artificial manures, not robbing the farm of more than the natural accumulative profit allowable by nature.

I believe that through these means in twenty years I shall see something remarkable—a land overflowing with milk and honey. I have already occasionally seen the fringe of what I want—a field bursting with wild white clover and rye grass, on which years ago one could not have taken a worth-while crop of anything. But I do not *know* that I am right: the view I have taken, which I think so long-headed, may in reality be only a *cul-de-sac*. The only possible way of preserving and handing on our life-cycle may be very much more difficult than I have imagined necessary; to save our world from gradual relapse to Martian desert it may be necessary to rotate the forest over our farming soils—a hundred years perhaps of agriculture followed by a hundred years or

## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

so of forest. Such a drastic step may be right, it may be the solution of preserving life on this earth; but we shall muddle on from day to day until mankind realizes that life has purpose.

My vision, fortunately, only has to stretch far enough to see some way of turning my inheritance of dreams and legends into an accomplished fact and the only way this can be arranged in agriculture is by a very long-term policy—a policy of non-grabbing—of working the land in with stock. I have been at it long enough to know that the methods I am working on are giving a very slow improvement in the health of the stock and the soil, while I have seen enough of the ranch farmer and the ‘cash as much as you can crop’ farmer to know that, in the main, they are slipping back. Therefore I must suppose that my methods are correct and will eventually (long after I am too old and done to enjoy them!) bring the answer of radiant health, stock, soil, and crops, coupled with a long-lost profit.

Most breeders dabble at some time with some form of cross and I admit to having dabbled—but only one. I do not think now that my idea was right but I have long noticed that first-cross animals, between two pure lines, seem to have remarkable qualities of productivity.

I tried, as I have told you, an out-cross with pigs but in the end came to the conclusion that steady breeding of the pure line produced as good results. I tried also a cross between a very good Guernsey bull and a few selected Ayrshire heifers—it did not tell me a great deal as the larger percentage of the cross were bulls and a number of the animals died off as calves; in the end I got four Guernsey cross cows and they are very fine cows indeed. Their butterfat is as good as our Ayrshires’, but no better. They seem healthy and one could not know they were crosses except that they have long, rather narrow heads.

I do not think, however, we have gained anything from the cross as we did not obtain the factor I was trying to catch—the yellow colour in the milk.

Ayrshires’ milk is always white; even in the spring it only gets as near yellow as to be described as ‘off white’, while to my observation a Guernsey is the yellowest breed we have. A Guernsey is just all yellow, it is yellow in colour, yellow in flesh, and in the spring the milk becomes almost orange, while in dead winter—when fresh carotene is at a premium—it never gets whiter than daffodil. It would seem that the Guernsey breed must possess some factor for storing up

## COWS

carotene and it was this factor I wished to catch. I admit to having a strong fancy for yellow milk, as I have for brown eggs.

My first try has not been successful, but that does not mean we are beaten; the next step is to find which cows in the herds give the yellowest milk and see if we can build the factor up by crossing and selection.

The unfortunate thing is that I do not know the real health value of what I am trying to get, for carotene is a rather unknown quantity in regard to human health, but I have a fancy that the majority of people (all things being equal) would choose yellow milk rather than white milk; I am certain they would choose yellow butter, otherwise why do manufacturers colour their butter yellow? If so many people want this yellow colour there is something in it for I am certain we have natural selective instincts which tell us what we can eat and what we cannot. By generations of artificial feeding, of course, these instincts must be blurred, but probably the three obvious ones (taste, smell, and colour) linger on and when we show a desire for yellow milk, or brown eggs, or green lettuce, it is because there is some quality about these colours which our instinct recognizes as being good for us.

Jock has a herd of Guernsey cattle and showed some butter at a local show. The conditions of the butter-making class were that no colouring matter should be used, while the show took place in a county of mainly Ayrshire herds. Jock did not get a prize; his plate of practically orange butter lay isolated from a long line of pure white slabs. Two women were regarding the brilliant saffron butter, and as I approached I heard one remark:

'The cheek of yon!'

I told them—as a point of interest—that the butter was not artificially coloured but came from a Channel Island breed noted for its yellow milk. They listened politely and then laughed outright:

'That'll no' do,' they said, and added, 'You see, we make butter and we ken.'

I think this story shows my point.

Guernsey pigmentation is so outrageous it is almost impossible to believe it real. One feels like the child, on seeing the giraffe at the Zoo, 'That's not true, anyway!'

However I did not catch the buttercup yellow by the cross.

Everybody has their favourite cow; often not the most deserving.

## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

Lily, at Oldwood, was the land-girls' favourite; they were always giving her titbits and wept openly when she died. Muriel is Violet's favourite; she is something of a character and for a long time, in heifer days, lived practically in our house, leaning permanently over the garden fence, waiting to talk to people or receive titbits. The memory lingers on and she prances about in the byre until spoken to, scratched, and titbitted. She is otherwise a bad milker though fairly high in butterfat. Little Daffodil, daughter of Old Daffodil—who was daughter of the original Babs—is the children's pet; she is very nervous of her own kind but adores human beings. Being born in August 1941 she has not yet had her first calf. My favourite, I have told you, is Old Ovation, followed by Young Ovation, and I confess—apart from their health and splendid milk and butterfat records—they have two other qualities I admire, they are unusually brown for Ayrshires (I don't like the pure white type of Ayrshire) and also I think they give the most yellow milk.

The male of the dairy breeds is, unfortunately, prone to be more than somewhat tricky. I am ready to trust any beef cattle bull—will lean against an Aberdeen, knock my pipe out on the horns of a Hereford, or give a Shorthorn a kick in the seat—but I don't trust the dairy breeds, be it only a Dexter. *If* I put any trust in any dairy bull it would be a Jersey. I thought at one time by being allowed more freedom their tempers might be improved, but found as soon as they get up in years it is not safe. Several people have had spots of bother with bulls; now we give them an 'OUT' and 'IN' box, with a dividing door which can be shut and opened from the outside so that nobody has to come in contact. Even so, an Irish cattleman at Oldwood forgot to shut the outside door when he was cleaning the box out and got a big surprise with two ribs broken! Fortunately he came out all right but he has never trusted a bull since.

The only time I wanted to get a bull worked up I did not succeed. Years ago, before the war, a young man came over to see us; he was, I think, rather keen on a girl staying in the house; anyway, he started to tell us after dinner what fun bull-fighting was and that he was an amateur matador and had taken part in a corrida and how he longed to fight more bulls. I thought it would be interesting to take him at his word.

'Fine,' I said, 'we'll have a bull-fight.'

I found a red cape and my old Army parade sword.

## COWS

'Come on boys, what fun!'

As we all walked down towards the field I noticed the young man seemed a little distraught. West Green Recorder stood in the centre of the field looking every inch a bull, a huge, massive, practically white beast, perhaps sixteen hundredweight of him.

'Here you are, old man, hop in, have a bit of fun and then kill him,' I said.

He got over the fence very gingerly although the bull was a couple of hundred yards away, then turned:

'I could not kill a valuable bull like that,' he remarked.

'O.K.,' I assured him. 'He's too savage to keep, chased a couple of people already; we will have to have him put away.'

This was the truth although, of course, I did not expect him to attempt to kill the bull and was merely calling his bluff.

'Give it a wave up,' I suggested.

He waved his cloak abstractedly.

'Go a bit nearer, he has not seen you properly, keep him running round you a bit.'

He cut down the distance to a hundred and fifty yards, walking forward nervously, and then stopped. Tom Logie, I think, arrived at this point and was a little surprised to find a man in a dinner-jacket standing in a field, sword in hand, shaking a child's red cloak.

'He kills bulls,' I explained. 'Makes them run round him.'

Tom became interested and lit his pipe. However, West Green Recorder started to eat grass. Violet has no fear of animals and immediately got through the fence with a handful of stones.

'I'll throw these stones at him, and stir him up.' She walked deliberately over the field so I got over the fence too and we went forward and chucked stones at the bull, but he refused to play.

'Go on, you brute,' I shouted at him, getting close enough to give him a slap, but all the savage bull would do was to walk quickly away from us.

Bulls are terrible cowards; he would have gone full tilt at a child unconsciously strolling unarmed across the field and, before he was put down, chased many unsuspecting people.

When it was obvious that he was not going to give our friend a fight we turned to find the bull-fighter had retired the fifty yards and recrossed the fence. Bull-fighting was not mentioned again.

## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

I was told afterwards by a man who has fought several bulls that for this recreation you must have a special type of animal which charges straight at you; it would be highly dangerous to take on a jinking bull, so perhaps the young man knew more than I thought.

This incident proved to me that if you stand up to a dairy bull it may not go for you, but it is not a trick I wish to try often. Violet, on the other hand, takes a delight in talking to bulls, scratching their heads however much they bellow—a habit I try and dissuade her from.

Torquil Stewart Richardson had the same disregard of bulls. Megginch Dale put him on the ground one day and he could do nothing but kick at its face; Allan Hynd came in like a whirlwind, with a hay-fork, and they put Dale in its place; but even that did not spoil Torquil's nerve for bulls, although he agreed they were perhaps best shut up.

Even when they are shut up things happen. Admiral, at Balcillum, kicks up a 'song and dance' on sight of any stranger and one day went full blast at the door of his box, took it down by the roots, and caused everybody a lively time until he was driven in.

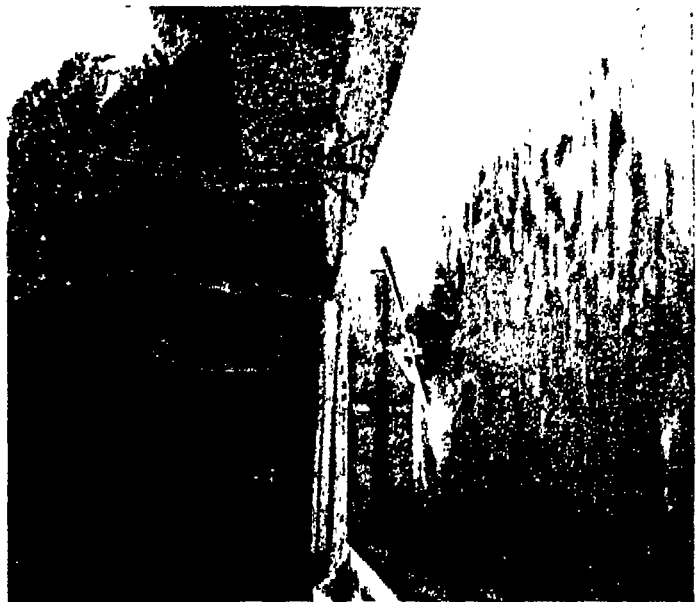
It is this maddening habit of bulls going savage and also getting too heavy as they grow older which is the curse of cow-breeding, because it is seldom one can keep a sire long enough to know what sort of stock he is producing and whether he is improving the herd or not.

There have been quiet bulls. Peter Royalist, the Guernsey bull, was so quiet one could have played darts on him and he would have taken no notice. He was permanently loose. Megginch Producer, whom we sold, was so peaceful the children played with him.

There is of course no rule about bulls, but I think one should start watching them at about three years old for it is at that age they begin to get a wicked look in their eye if they are going to have it; on the whole, however, I am inclined to believe the only safe dairy bull is a dead one.



THE CURLING POND  
(NOW OVERGROWN)



THE SWIMMING POOL  
(NOW A SILAGE PIT)





THE FLOWER GARDEN BEFORE THE WAR



SANDY ALEXANDER

## ORCHARDS

### *Orchards*

**I**t is difficult in life to rule sentiment entirely out of one's calculations. We are agreed, I think, that the Victorian world immediately preceding ours erred on the side of over-sentimentality; but it is also possible that in our efforts to become purposeful we may err on the side of toughness.

I certainly admit to a degree of romanticism over the Old Orchard—you will see it in the air photograph of the house and stable-yard—a secluded spot of eleven acres shielded from view by hedges and belts of trees and sheltered by the fourteen-foot brick wall of the kitchen garden. The Old Orchard—to the childish mind—represented that secret Isle of Escape which so many people, even of riper years, cherish secretly; it may be a house in a forest or a cosy flat, but more persons than one would suppose have locked away in their inner minds a dream place to which they escape to be entirely free.

For children the Old Orchard was Heaven! It was filled with moss-grown apple-trees of legendary antiquity, all easily climbable; a pear-tree, in fact, was leaning at a gradient of not much more than one in five—I cannot remember the day when I could not walk up it. There was another pear-tree too as big as an oak. We called it the Ship. In spring one could imagine it about to sail, a sheet of translucent white blossom from the jib to the royals. The Ship took a lot of climbing and the ground looked very far down when one got up, but it was worth while because one was able to become completely concealed in the foliage and thus imagine oneself hiding from Incas in an Amazonian cotton-tree; lying on a branch one could imagine them lighting fires and doing a war dance. It was grand, for I knew that later on I would shoot them with my blow-pipe, one by one, as they climbed up to attack me. The Ship never missed a bumper crop, although tar oil and lime sulphur were unknown words to her; she was covered from stem to stern with a dense mass of bright yellow pears—perhaps a couple of bull's-eyes in size and tobacco leaf yellow in colour. From an economic point of view the Ship was useless; I can remember no one—not even in the hungry days of 1918—who wanted to buy her cargo, and jam made from the little pears was not particularly palatable. She

## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

harvested herself and the harvest rotted around her. I would never have had the heart to scuttle the Ship; however, one equinoctial gale she foundered herself. Practically alongside the Ship was anchored the Cutter—an apple whose variety was popular in Shakespeare's day: a Cat's Head apple—I doubt if it could ever have been very popular since for the large fruit had a musty taste. While the Cat's Head flowered brilliantly she was shy about turning her blossom to account and was a wicked cropper. A good climbing tree, we fashioned a deck up in her branches and made a rope ladder to let down. If you have ever fashioned a rope ladder, or endeavoured to climb up or down a home-made one, you will realize that the ladder gave more colour to the ship idea than practical service. The Cutter did not ride her moorings long after the Ship sank—she had relied entirely on the big tree for shelter and when the old hulk went she soon followed.

Nearer the house was an apple-tree with a legend which I must confess never seemed to me likely although we told it to all visitors. The version I had handed down to me was that a man at some legendary date was discovered stealing apples, was chased by the steward of the house and shot. Later the steward planted some of the seeds of the stolen apples and in this manner produced this curious variety. I think the careful manner of presumably not only eating the stolen fruit but planting the seeds as well is a demonstration of the thoroughness of the Scotch character. I like also the casual way in which the ploughman was shot and the apparent lack of comment or reproach about the matter—it approximates to the killing grandeur of a Western movie. My mother discovered us talking about 'the Bloody Ploughman'; the adjective in those days meant a great deal but our innocent faces assured people that we had no idea the word was naughty—had never heard David Sharp, the coachman, use it frequently.

Heather gave a Punch and Judy show at one of the estate parties; I felt I could sink through the floor when I heard Mr. Punch say, apropos of his wife Judy, 'I never liked the bloody woman, anyway!' but nobody seemed to think it unusual dialogue to come from the lips of a child of ten; so 'bloody' has reached the 'drat' class of my youth, a term which was permissible, even though its original meaning was, I believe, 'God rot'.

When the last of our old-fashioned swear words has reached the category of 'bloody' and 'drat', we will be rid of yet another complex

## ORCHARDS

—a 'day's march nearer home'—maybe! Anyway, we perpetuated the B. Ploughman legend and proved the story by showing the pinkish insides of the fruit. B. Ploughman was a showy cropper and the fruit just edible.

Orchards had been a feature of the district for generations but there is scarcely one left; yet I do not think they have by any means had their day; they form a profitable side-line to our other activities.

It is naturally futile to try and grow eating apples in competition with, say, Canadian Macintosh Red, Hood River Gravenstein, Australian Granny Smith, or our southern Coxes, but we have the right climate and soil to grow wonderful cookers, with a sharp, distinctive taste and marvellous keeping qualities. In sober truth, I have not tasted better cookers than we grow locally. It is probably one of the last outposts where they will grow profitably before the climate becomes too severe and this crisp weather is just what a cooker needs to give it the acid punch and the keeping qualities a cooker must have.

The hardest types of plums also do exceptionally well and every year or so the crop breaks the branches.

I have therefore planned, first, to increase what one might call the orcharding proper, and secondly, to provide an acre or so of orchard with each farm. These little orchards add to the appearance of the farm, would provide a convenient place to run out the very young calves, would give the workers enough cooking fruit for the winter, and should supply a surplus to be graded and stored at a central estate depot.

In addition to the Old Orchard I have been describing there is the New Orchard—which is over forty years old—and my own Young Orchard—a mere babe of fourteen. The final target in orchards I plan for is sixty acres, and we are about at the half-way mark. My aim is to establish the orchards with a definite time lapse between the plantings so that a final rotation can be built up, in which a too old orchard is taken out, the ground put through a rotation of crops, and replanted. Thus eventually there would be blocks of orchard at different stages of growth and bearing, producing a steady and (almost) guessable output of fruit.

I have followed the fashion of poisonous spraying and we use the whole range of poisons from tar oil to lime sulphur, but I am not happy about it nor ever have been. There is, I think, something faulty in our

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reasoning over this spraying business. I have not anything tangible except that I know by instinctive feeling it is wrong. Some of my old friends in the Old Orchard preserved (because they are 'so pretty' or have romantic associations!) until they blow down have never smelt a drop of spray or dry dust, but they have 'bloom', they flower magnificently, fruit in abundance, and the crop does not seem so much damaged by insects as the artificially treated ones; maybe the insects shun them for sweeter varieties.

The newest orchard is going back at an alarming rate and, although it is free from moss and lichen, is regularly pruned, and has most of the insects poisoned out, it doesn't crop as it should. There are, of course, dozens of other reasons that might account for it (weak stocks, to give one) but I am not happy. I can't help seeing things. It is what a farmer sees that really decides him in policy, even though all the text-books and common sense may point in the opposite direction. I see a group of Willow pears which have never been sprayed, which have never been pruned, which have never been manured; they crop, year after year, consistently, with good-quality fruit. I remember three standard Bramley Seedlings I have known intimately for a lifetime; I have known them, year after year, covered with magnificent large green apples; they were never pruned, they were never sprayed, they received nothing except, perhaps, lime. It is possible these Bramleys are now getting old, but they are not the same; we spray them correctly and do all that East Malling would approve; they crop all right but there is 'something', I just would not know quite what. I could not nail it to the wall; it is just what 'I sees'.

Spraying and the other operations cost a lot of money; so one wants to find the doctored trees 'way ahead of the undoctored—but one does not!

When God made little apples He made little pests as well. If they had needed spraying I think He would have provided them with telephones to ring up the chemical companies for supplies—at least He would have gone down in my estimation as a Creator if He had not.

## HARVESTING

### *Harvesting*

When the great plough-up campaign spread over the country my plan was thrown out of joint, for I had to plough up ground which I had not scheduled for this purpose—fields scattered long distances apart, still with the drains and ditches choked, while the pasture contained a large proportion of couch, a species of grass which, as the name implies, grows by rhizomes—that is, by sending out roots which branch off at intervals and form new clumps of grass. To propagate couch, or twitch, it is only necessary to cut off half an inch of root and heel it in. It seems a pity that so easily propagated a species should be such a nightmare to a farmer, for couch itself is a poor quality feed. One has only to pick a bunch of it and study the thin blades to easily understand that it is not nutritious—in the same way one would understand, by examining a lump of coal, that even M. Escoffier himself could never make it palatable!

There is, in spite of anything which may have been said by farmers and professors, no practical way of getting rid of couch except by some form of fallow. It will be remembered that during the first extreme urgency of digging for victory fallows were taboo; thus the fields had to be cropped, ploughed, sown, cultivated, and harvested, undrained and infested by couch. In addition the crop had to contend against the large colonies of grubs, etc., which had made their home in the pastures for thirty years or so. I would not like to live through those years again. It is no pleasure to any right-thinking person to do deliberately what he knows to be wrong. The soil to me is a friend and must be treated with the respect with which one must treat one's friends if they are to remain in that category; you cannot ride rough-shod over them; you must—at times—humour them, for if one treats them scurvily they are likely no longer to be friends but to become enemies. The rape of these lands, I knew, would turn the soil from a friend into a foe.

After the estate had been suddenly converted to arable I had to think of a method to deal with the scattered cereal crops.

My first idea was to stack in the fields and tour round with a travelling mill, threshing during the winter months. But there were many objections to this scheme, as it would entail a great amount of

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winter work without a great number of additional staff and the ordinary farm work would lag behind; again, the straw would eventually have to be carted from the outlying fields and this would require a considerable amount of labour. I therefore decided to take a plunge and go in for combined harvesting, although it had not hitherto been tried in this district.

Originally I had planned to incorporate a drier in the central granary in order to reduce the moisture content of all grains requiring to be kept over long periods, and to dry out the cereals and beans intended for our stock feeding—by reducing the moisture content they grind easier and keep better as meal. Meal made from 'stock' with a high moisture content soon heats up. I believe also that seed is improved by reducing the moisture content considerably.

I now decided to get the drying-plant in as quickly as possible so that I could dry off and store the combined grain. I described, in the chapter dealing with the Granary, the various difficulties we encountered the first season, when only three-quarters of the drier had arrived and we converted a dynamo to a motor. Those were the days of the Battle of Britain and the general blitzing of our industries, when it was a remarkable achievement. The firm who supplied the drier (Messrs. Turner, of Ipswich) deserve a great deal of credit for the way they have experimented with and perfected this equipment. Whether we continue with combined harvesting, revert to binding, or adopt a new system, it will play a large part in the farming of the future. They are the most delightful people to deal with and craftsmen of the first order.

When I spent a day in Ipswich, talking them into selling an outfit to me, they warned me that it would be impossible to deliver all the equipment in time for the harvest and were almost in tears over the prospect of allowing bits of their plant to go out, knowing the job would not be gilt-edged. It says something for the machine that, with only three-quarters of it in hand and put up by ourselves, we managed that first harvest to dry out over five hundred tons of grain.

Since those days Turners have made a number of vital improvements and have been kind enough to let me incorporate them in the drier, which has consequently been kept as up-to-date as their latest models.

I shall always remember that rush trip to Ipswich—at a period when Alerts and All-Clears were mixed up to such an extent that one did not

## HARVESTING

know whether a raid was on or not. My sisters, Jean and Frances, are air-raid wardens in Lambeth. Their house had had a direct hit; the hostel where they had taken rooms had gone; their wardens' post had gone and half the new house—in which they still live. In addition, Frances, hearing a near one coming down, had lain on an incendiary bomb, and Jean had got more than a touch of blast. At the time of my visit their new post had just had a direct hit and they were two of the six survivors. They kindly gave me a room during my stay in London. Frances and I discussed Art (she is an artist by trade), while Jean and I talked of the old days, when we were all kids. I found it was not done to make any reference to bombs; when I started to tell a bomb story of my own I saw, by their pained expressions, that I was reverting to the category of a line-shooter.

It occurred to me that women are either much braver than men or feel things less.

The story of the purchase of the combining plant is all mixed up with rush visits to London, bombs whistling, cheery people saying, 'Pity you had not been here yesterday, we might have helped you, but look at the works now', and with Frances and Jean—off duty after collecting bits of people—arguing as to how far the colour photograph has cut into the work of the commercial artist.

The combines were destined for Sweden and bore the Swedish instructional captions; I imagine the Government's decision to way-lay them was a wise one, for their final destination must have been a place where the fields are more tractable to mechanized farming than the average Swedish farm. The baler I originally purchased is, I am afraid, at the bottom of the Atlantic, but I eventually obtained a very excellent machine. It dealt with hay and straw neatly and expeditiously, it worked in harvest-time continuously, by means of shifts, and became a universal favourite. The combines also were willing workers—and they had something to do I can tell you. A number of the newly broken-in fields were very rough and filled with stones. The first season was wet—a bad harvest year—while the crops on the old pastures were, in themselves, heavy and filled with thistles. Breakdowns were frequent and always of the one spare we had not got; usually we had to construct a new part overnight or improvise something until one could be obtained; the telephone rang constantly on long distance; amongst this frenzy of bustle and excitement strolled an army of sightseers who had



## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

not seen the machines before and wanted to see if there was anything in them.

As I mention elsewhere, the spectator of the new machine is divided into classes—those who are over-optimistic and those who have already decided that it will not work. Of the first school, I remember a farmer in particular who, like the wise men of old, had journeyed a long way from the east and was prepared to worship the new machine. It was in the days when—by judicious petrol-saving—one could still go occasional long trips on business. He brought either his foreman or his brother-in-law—I could not quite make out which, perhaps both. I found them rubbing their hands as though the millennium had arrived. The drier was still in its half-dressed state, the elevator belts running uncased and showering grain down into the pit below where, at intervals, it had to be shovelled by hand. We were very short of labour owing to the seven day and night shifts; there was no extraction plant and dust settled over one, depositing inches at a time. These two visitors gazed, at one of my 'press-ganged temporary workers'—Jimmy Stewart Grainger, on leave—who was lifting hundredweight bags in fine style; they beamed on him, remarking, 'Got one of the Jocks in to help'. They strode in amongst the curtain of dust enthusiastically exclaiming, 'Fine, just what we want'.

I warned them against the belts. We had not got new ones; at that time they were a patchwork of rotting balata and frequently flew off in your face, but the two men only laughed at the flapping belts.

'Fine, fine, they work all right.'

They came out of the drier, overjoyed.

'First-class!' they declared.

Next they viewed the bins for grain storage, which Joe Stewart was still building just in front of the incoming grain; these were somewhat tricky things to view, as one had to walk across them on a loose plank, with a twenty-five foot drop to hard concrete.

'Capital, capital!'

Their enthusiasm began to get me down for I had realized, by now, it was genuine. They had made up their minds—against God knows how much good advice—to go in for combined harvesting, and they had come prepared to be delighted, and so every new piece of the scheme—whether broken-down or not—filled them with intense satisfaction.

## HARVESTING

I decided to take them to the combine which was cutting an impossible field, a monster crop of wheat, flatter than the billiard-table I gave to the R.A.F., but spiked with the bonniest Scotch thistles you ever saw. They stood on the combine platform and watched—enchanted—the sodden mass crashing itself into the machine, felt the torrent of soaking wheat pouring into the sacks and, were delighted.

I was myself rather pleased for, whilst they were there, we did not have one hold-up; the machine hacked its way into the tangled mass with great efficiency.

'Nae bother at all,' the farmer said, 'if it cuts and threshes this, it will cut anything.'

The brother-in-law, or foreman, looked at me.

'Our crops are much worse than this,' he said sagely.

'Then God help you,' I replied piously.

But the pessimists were far more numerous than the optimists. The pessimists were legion; many of their criticisms were obvious and true but, curiously enough, during the seasons that followed we were able to overcome all the criticisms suggested that first season—the ones we could not overcome were not made!

Unfortunately I started the war without film for my camera and have obtained none since, otherwise I would have liked to take a picture of one of the few fine harvest Sundays that wet season. We were cutting barley; by the middle of the afternoon it looked like a point-to-point crowd at a meeting of a fashionable pack; the road was lined with cars, whilst groups of people sat about in the field. Behind the machines paced the usual crowd of observers, picking up the threshed heads and rubbing them in their hands for a missed seed, or measuring the length of straw uncut.

The machines themselves were so densely covered with people that they looked like the last bus on a bank holiday. A great number of the crowd helped intelligently, picking up the grain sacks and throwing them on the carts, or loading and unloading the baled straw on the extra-sized carts we had provided for the purpose.

It is, of course, traditional entertainment for all children to ride on hay and harvest carts, and on this Sunday they were so thick one could not see the straw bales. A good time, I think, was had by all—and if the combines did nothing more they provided the district with one supreme Sunday outing.

## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

I did not dare to ask the Agricultural Committee their views. Various members came and followed—in, by now, the well-known manner—picking up ears and rubbing them in their hands; whenever a grain was found they murmured together pleasantly. Actually, in case you ever want to know if a combine is efficient or not, this is not the best method of ascertaining—for a combine can be set to thresh out all the grain—if adjusted correctly, it actually gets more grain from a field than any other known method. Kick over the trail of straw left by the machine and see if there is any grain left on the ground, for that is the way waste occurs. The operator when starting adjusts the concave so that all the grain is threshed but he cannot tell easily if the riddles choke and when they do a trail of grain runs out behind and falls unnoticed under the straw. The Committee members said little, they were in rather a difficult position for combines were beginning to be thought something of throughout the country; their advantages, under war conditions, are obvious—they might have come to stay! Thus they said nothing beyond the usual remarks made by all farmers.

The most intelligent comment was made by a ploughman, who said:

‘If every farmer went in for it how would they manage to store all the grain?’

If one thinks of the capacity of the average farm-building, especially in the south, the criticism is a very wise one.

It was from farm servants too that I received praise.

‘If it wasna for folks like you we’d be still cutting wi’ a scythe,’ and:

‘Dinna worry, John, you’re doing fine—they’re all jealous of you!’

I don’t think this last remark was actually the case, but somehow it had the desired effect of being soothing.

By the third season nobody worried to look at the combines, which was—in some respects—a pity, for we had by this time ironed out the faults and got them into a fairly smooth system of working. The drier was dustless and the early rush and tumble had given place to a smooth, efficient working pace in which we handled more grain without any shouting; but I cannot remember having a single visitor. There were days when I would like to have had one of the old pessimists around.

Whether through my efforts or through the swing of fashion I know not, but there are now several combines in the district and more

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on order for next year; I understand that some of the latest models are very much more efficient than mine and there is, at any rate, one very efficient drier well laid out in a new building but, curiously enough, I have not seen locally a pick-up baler. This, I think, is a mistake, because combined straw is difficult to handle by any other method and is apt to be left lying on the field—a bad advertisement for the system. The baling of the threshed straw actually forms one of the greatest advantages of combining because it saves a great deal on transport costs and where—as was the case with us—a number of outlying farms are dealt with it becomes a necessity.

It is very useful for the hay crop too; we have made some amazingly good hay by its use and, although it is against my principles to sell hay, I have sold some of this baled hay every year to a few chosen customers. A man who has paid hard-earned money for an article is an even better critic than a routine scientist with a small sample in a laboratory; these hay customers have liked it and wanted more.

Considered from every point of view, I think combining is a better method of harvesting than binding. There are, of course, very many technical objections to both processes; neither is by any means perfect. This view seems to be shared by a great number of farmers all over the country.

The reasons for selling the combines were numerous. First, members of our Committee do not—in their hearts—approve of them; they have the power to put me out of farming permanently; I have no legal power to fight or appeal against any decision they may make; we have crossed swords twice, resulting for me in one win and one loss—I did not wish to play the final! And I had other reasons too.

I have now managed to get the scattered farms on their own legs and thus the urgency for drastic methods is no longer there. The cartage distances are much less and it is, therefore, no longer necessary to rush over the place in a large squad as it is now possible for the farms to attack their harvest simultaneously; to do this with combines would need many more machines, while the bulk of grain arriving at the same time at the drier would be beyond its capacity.

While these points could be overcome there is another consideration—an interesting one. I have for some time been experimenting with a completely revolutionary method of harvesting and believe that this will not only be successful but more suitable to the conditions of this

## ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE

country and our methods of farming than anything we have got to-day. It is an exciting proposition, for the same machine would harvest all our crops but, even if I could obtain the materials to construct the experimental plant, I would not dare—in my present position—do anything which might not come off or, for the matter of that, anything wildly original. I must wait until better days return.

When I realized at the end of last harvest that 'combining' was one of the things I did which annoyed our Committee, I reluctantly decided to go back to binding. From my many years of experience of binding I know that—sooner, not later—the binder breaks down, causing a stoppage, maybe for hours. I have also tried the latest power-driven binders against older-fashioned types and find the old less troublesome. The new binders have many more refinements and gadgets—very like those on a sewing machine; nobody drags a sewing machine over a rough field but these delicate pieces of machinery have to stand bumps and strains. The newer machines also often increase the width of cut over the old horse-drawn ones and this—in a heavy crop—is a disadvantage as it makes the sheaves too heavy to lift comfortably all day. I said to Sandy Hodge, 'If ever we go back to binding we won't have anything fancy, but we will have quantity.'

A new binder costs between £100 and £250 and requires a licence to purchase, so I went to every farm-sale I could and bought binders, choosing those of known make which had cut through the last harvest successfully. I bought nine for £140 and have bought more since; they will be gone over before harvest and, for each one at work, there will be another standing idle, so that when one breaks down it will be hauled out of the way and another yoked up. The farm manager will telephone H.Q. (where an old milk-van has been turned into a service workshop) and the blacksmith will be able to go to the field and straighten things out. If I know binders this equipment will not be idle.

To return to the ploughing up. I am amazed when I travel to see the way in which the country varies from agricultural committee to agricultural committee in the matter of plough-up-ness. In some counties I notice a very reasonable and sensible view has been taken, whilst in others land has been reclaimed at stupendous cost, out of all proportion to its value or area; again, in some places I have seen hillsides ploughed which could never have been worth the labour involved or produce

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enough food to justify either the imported fuel used in cultivation or the damage to imported machinery.

I heard the other day that Greenhow Hill (near Morley, in Yorkshire) has been cultivated and this interested me, for one of our best-known seers is reputed to have prophesied:

'When Greenhow Hill is harrowed and sown,  
Poor England will lie tattered and torn—  
While children will run out into the street  
When they see a man.'

The form of Ursula Shipton is good; although if my quotation is correct her poetry did not scan very well—however, she also forecast 'carriages will run without horses and men will fly like birds'. Mother Shipton flourished at the end of the fifteenth century and I cannot but agree with her on one point—poor England does, in many places, look agriculturally very tattered and torn, especially in those semi-urban districts where it is impossible to keep labour on the land owing to the higher wages of factory employment. The dispersal of stacks adds to the tattered appearance, but—to give you a little encouragement for the future—I must tell you that there are at least two Greenhow Hills, while it is not certain that Mother Shipton ever existed.

## *Vegetables*

**W**e try and run the Kitchen Garden for profit, although it has never been particularly profitable. It is large, for a walled garden, being about three acres. Recently, to supply 'military organizations' with vegetables, we have spread it on to ground that once was carefully mown grass.

The walled garden is in two halves; part one was made by the first John, who bought Megginch. There is a sundial in the wall, with a very old wistaria twisting over it; the date is weathered away as the stone was originally cut the wrong way of the grain; I think the date was 1590.

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Part two was built by Robert. He made the back walls hollow so that they could be heated; it seems rather an expensive idea and nobody remembers seeing this device in action; in any case, peaches, nectarines and apricots grow quite happily without the central heating.

In the flower garden there was a glasshouse which fell down and was removed. Two camellia-trees remained behind—they have struggled through three hard winters and managed to flower each spring; a camellia must be tougher than I imagined, but I must add that, although alive, these camellias do not look very happy.

The kitchen garden is run by Annie Smeaton. Annie came to us from a nursery garden three years before the war. I don't think I need give any other description of her than to say that she is excellent.

Annie is assisted by Chrissie—a friend of hers, also trained in a nursery garden—and Nan. Nan is, I suppose, technically a land-girl—she came to us early in the war when she was called up from her job in a shop. Her husband was taken prisoner at Crete. Now Nan says she would rather work in the garden than in a shop. There is also Isobel—she is the daughter of Dave Stewart, the joiner.

For heavy work these girls can obtain some labour from a floating band of Italian prisoners who are moved around the place to fill up the constant gaps of the 'called up', ill, etc., and push forward work that has got behind. The band is headed by Mario, who has been with us over a year.

The Italians present a problem; I would like to draw them more into the family, and they are eager to be drawn; but the position is a delicate one as many of our boys are still at the war and to 'butter-up' these Wops does not seem right, for our lads have been fighting hard and the Italians have merely raised their hands at the first sign of danger. They do try desperately hard to please and they have been prisoners so long they can hardly remember anything else. Mario, three years ago, was twenty when he was taken.

I adopt this course. I don't speak to them direct except for a 'Buon Giorno' or 'Good night' as we pass, or a smile and wave when they jump to attention on seeing me. They cause no trouble. Mario told Corky that one of them—Giovanni—is a different class from the others—what that exactly means I do not know, but the distinction seems strange to me.

We had one once, called the Duke, who sported a black tie; he came

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as a temporary measure and spoke English fluently. The Duke, I fancy, was a courtesy title, but he was inclined to get lost in the black-currant bushes and not be found until it was time to go home. He appeared from some corner at meal-times and made long speeches to the others; I thought he showed symptoms of making trouble so we did not have him any more.

The prescribed system of employing Italian prisoners is that we pay the Government for them, while the Government allows us so much back for their keep and, in addition, they are given a few shillings as pocket money; this pocket money they cannot spend direct in shops, but give us a list of their requirements. One of the biggest items of this budget is hair-oil. Actually two of our Italians are barbers; hair-cutting is difficult in wartime and I was becoming so poetical that I got one of them to cut my hair. I think it was a mistake, as it came near the fraternizing mark—one is bound to talk to one's barber and give him a present afterwards; I am not really sure, either, that I like the back of my neck shaved or the hairs cut out of my ears, although it may be good practice in Italy.

Tom Logie was on leave the other day; he has done pretty well in the war—two Russian convoys and some pretty hot stuff in the Middle East and Malta. I asked him to give me a ruling about the Wops and their treatment: 'What you'd do would be the right way,' he said—which I thought rather sweet.

I asked a neighbouring farmer how he dealt with them: 'Send a land-girl in with them when they go to the pictures'—but there was a twinkle in his eye as he said it.

Returning to the garden, I must mention our plan of a very long-term rotation, dividing it into blocks and gradually moving them round. Thus in the vegetable block a few celery trenches are dug every year and these gradually move across the block, followed by strawberries which, in their declining years, have bush fruit planted amongst them to be—in due course—taken out and the vegetable cycle started again.

Annie puts more dung and compost on the garden than has ever been done in my lifetime; her whole tribe of girls barrow it out, practically continuously, and lay it on so thick that the ground is invisible. The results are excellent. She grows onions of enormous size, although I personally—and quite a lot of people—prefer small



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onions as being more toothsome; but Annie wins prizes for her onions, so it must be right!

We have rather lost sight of our marketing policy during the war as it is not a question of selling vegetables but rather of rationing out the produce we have amongst the people who clamour for it.

The gardens have gone on much the same for the last three hundred years, for mechanization is not very practical in a walled enclosure. We have, however, a petrol-driven machine—called a Roto-tiller—which has given admirable service for ten years or so but we do not use it a great deal as it breaks the soil into too fine a tilth for winter digging, and our rows of vegetables are placed too near together to make use of it for intercultivation; it is, however, a great benefit for seed-bed preparation as it leaves a mealy mould in which seeds germinate rapidly.

There is a lean-to glasshouse on the south wall which is, more or less, a modern introduction; I say 'more or less' for it was erected in 1822. I think it is rather a good advertisement for teak that this building has passed its century and still survives. Its days are numbered, however, and I shall not be sorry to say good-bye to this veteran vinery when the time comes, for I abhor glasshouses in a walled garden and in my plan I have already allotted a special position for the erection of a number of commercial houses for the production of fruits best grown under glass, which may be expected to yield a return for the labour and trouble of growing them.

Apart then from the glasshouse, the occasional roar of the Roto-tiller and my new system of long-term rotation, the kitchen garden has continued without change from Elizabethan days. This is more remarkable than you might suppose for very few large country-house gardens have survived so long. They collapsed, for the most part, in the late nineteen-twenties; there were many reasons for their demise; modern refrigeration and consequent cheap imports of fruit from abroad made the expensively grown hothouse fruits hopelessly uneconomic; again, vegetables can be grown much more cheaply in a field, where they may be cultivated mechanically at a considerable saving.

The large glasshouses which became a feature of Victorian gardening were exceedingly expensive to run, and were only designed as works of art; an art which took the Crystal Palace as its inspiration

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and incorporated in its design tons of ornamental cast-iron work that served no purpose at all. But perhaps the strongest reason for the disappearance of vegetable gardens was that they were laid out a long way from the house. The Victorians considered it indecent to see vegetables, so they put their gardens as far away as possible from their dwellings—even with a garden a mile or so away from their homes they were still afraid of seeing vegetables on their infrequent visits, so they bordered the central path with flowers and made large beds of flowers in front of the Crystal Palace erections at the northern ends of their gardens; in this way they utilized the very best of the vegetable-growing area for the cultivation of flowers they never picked and seldom saw. I have known this dislike of seeing vegetables go even further than this and have seen gardens with high privet hedges growing around the vegetable beds, so that to find a vegetable in a garden designed for vegetables required considerable inside knowledge.

I have followed the fate of these maze-like gardens with considerable interest, for it is something of a problem to know exactly what to do with three or four acres of ground surrounded by a high and massively built wall, containing amongst other things, several hundreds of tons of broken glass, rotting wood, fancy iron-work, rusty iron pipes, and numerous gloomy potting-sheds; in addition one would have to consider a cracked stone fountain or some form of statuary. The owners have dealt with these places in different ways but, however clever the original idea, the end has worked out much the same—a high wall surrounding a horrible mess! Usually the owner has hit upon the idea of letting the garden to a market-gardener who after a few efforts finds the gardens impossible to work economically and concentrates on growing tomatoes in the desolate Crystal Palace—but here he is up against another snag, for these monstrosities were erected in the first place as works of art, and very little regard was paid to the economics of heating them. Thus he starts off with the disadvantage of a fuel bill very much heavier than his rivals' in modern commercial glasshouses and this factor—in the long run—gets him down.

Other owners, again, shrug their shoulders, lock the door on the whole affair, and studiously avoid going near the place. But one owner, I remember, would not let this type of garden get him down—he let it, enticing his tenant along by buying vegetables from him; later, when this inducement would not hold, the garden was given rent free, but

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even so the man found it too unprofitable and left. The owner then sold, or gave away, everything which could be sold or given away, and planted the garden with trees. It occurred to me that in a couple of hundred years the tree garden might be quite a problem to the historian—were the trees, at that period, considered so valuable that it was necessary to surround them with a fabulously expensive wall? Could the wall have been placed there as a protection against some large and now extinct animal? Had it, perhaps, been a private Zoo for the propagation of an arboreal species of shelter-loving reptile?

The reason that the Megginch garden has gone on so long lies in the fact that never, even in the height of Victorianism, has it become too fancy and that it is placed where a vegetable garden should be placed—twenty-five yards from the kitchen.

As I write we have actually got a cook, I am not quite sure how we have one, for everybody else seems to do their own cooking. I think it is because she has a child, her husband is in the Navy, and it all seems to fit in. I did not know we had a cook until I saw an attractive-looking woman walking up the garden path:

‘Isn’t it hell?’ she said, ‘there’s no mint.’

‘Hell,’ I answered, thinking she was a total stranger.

Before the war, I used to grow a few flowers in the garden—for sale and use in the house—to save picking those in the flower-garden proper. There is also a patch where I grow fancy things myself, which no one else is allowed to touch. I have had a lot of fun with my own gardening, without achieving anything of note. I had, until recently, a very exciting cross of oats selected from numerous crosses and line-breeding of the different families—work which had been going on for years. It was my aim to produce a strain of oat which would not lodge on rich, heavily manured soil; at last I considered that I had my ideal—an oat like an oak-tree—a heavy cropper, with a good-quality seed. In ‘forty-two I threw away all my other oat crosses and gave this one as much manure as I could dig into the ground and it stood up. In ‘forty-three, I calculated, I would grow enough seed for it to leave the garden and start up in a small field-plot. The ‘forty-three crop rushed up from the start, I put posts round it preparatory to supporting the net (one must net these small patches before the grain ripens or the birds make short work of it). My oat grew so high I had to put taller posts round it and it showed no sign of lodging; on the contrary, it looked like

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standing up to a hurricane. Then I had to leave home for a few days—a great friend of mine was killed in the war—about forty thousand and one worries descended on me—when I remembered my oat again, the birds had harvested the whole crop—there was not a single seed left! I think I would have cried but, fortunately, the humorous side occurred to me—the idea of anybody being so half-witted as to spend years of work and hours of time breeding a variety of oat, and then—in the last stage—forgetting to put a net over the posts already arranged struck me as supremely funny, but the shock remained, and when I set off to dig my garden this year somehow I had not the heart.

I had planned to grow some garlic (a herb we do not have in the garden), to develop a line of outdoor cucumbers, to experiment with sowing seeds according to the phases of the moon, and to cross two daffodils I had isolated for the purpose last year, but I could not get started. The old itch to turn over the rich soil was there, to smell the new earth smell which *Azotobacter*, the nitrogen-building bacteria, creates, to run out after dinner and water or hoe carefully between the rows, but—across this desire—lay the memory of Long John, my super oat, and start I could not.

Time has by now softened the blow. I am going to build myself a new garden (all to myself) and it will be inside a wire cage with a lockable door. I am not taking chances any more. So in seven or eight years I may have a new Long John—perhaps better than the last.

Before the austerity days I had another wonderful amusement. In the kitchen garden I took a small corner for my own and made a glass-roofed cage in which I bred butterflies. At first I learned the art with more or less native species, but in time I got bolder and imported exotic species and extended my activities to the old greenhouse in the flower garden. Here I had the supreme satisfaction of seeing in flight 'those iridescent blue butterflies'—Brazilian—whose wings are sometimes incorporated in paperweights, ashtrays, and garish jewellery. I had *Machiaon* (the yellow swallow-tail) laying her eggs on her food plant—carrot—but never managed to get her properly established outside.

In the happiness of thinking about my butterflies, I have wandered from the story of the vegetable garden. However, I suppose if anybody reads this book as far as this it will be because he is a country lover and stories about butterflies will not come amiss; for if you like the country

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you like all that goes with it. Nature-loving runs through my family ceaselessly. A grand-uncle of mine was mad keen on birds and must have had great fun collecting them (he had only fifteen short of a complete European collection). He stuffed all the birds himself and arranged them in glass cases round a room. It must have been great fun to do—although the fifteen short would have worried me! They are somewhat trying to live with, however, for if you sit down in this bird room you find yourself keenly observed from every angle by hundreds of pairs of eyes. It is aggravating to be continually watched by a golden eagle and a few vultures but when it gets down to wrens and Cornish choughs it is a little too much.

James Reid, who was head gardener in my youth—he was with us actually thirty-five years—Mr. Reid (as I called him, being a well brought-up kid), was so green of thumb that anything he touched grew luxuriantly; he taught me to graft and many other wonderfully entertaining accomplishments, but he taught me something else—that gardening cannot really be taught, it is (like other agricultural matters) in the nature of a religion which one must acquire for oneself; it is not really a text-book subject at all—it is intuitive.

James Reid was a wonderful man in many ways; round him, in my mind, hung a religious atmosphere for—in my very earliest childhood—I had him somewhat jumbled up with Adam (of Eden fame). James spoke seldom but what he said was to the point. A little story of him lingers in my mind: Sandy Black and James had been cutting a hedge half a mile from the house; they had an argument. James put down his shears and beckoned Sandy. They walked, one behind the other, without speaking, to the house and into the kitchen. James took up a newspaper, glanced at the top lines, thumbed the place, and handed it over to Sandy Black, remarking, 'I was right—it is Thursday'.

You will find some pictures of the pleasure gardens as they were before the war. To use an Air Force expression, 'They have had it'. The flower gardens grow vegetables, the lawns are ploughed up, the swimming-pool is used as a reserve silage pit, and the curling-pond is a bed of high rushes. It was, of course, the same at the end of the last war. In twenty-five years the wheel of fortune has taken a complete turn, but this time with a difference. I do not think we shall be able to get them back or keep them going if we did. Pleasure-grounds look simple but in reality they are extremely expensive to run. It does not appear

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likely that taxation will abate or that farming will become luxuriantly profitable. With E.P.T. we have banked no money in the war. To finish the plan will take me all my time without carrying dead weight. The question of how to bury them decently is one I keep putting off however, for I love flowers, the sharp shadows on well-kept lawns, to whack a ball over a tennis-net, or dive into a swimming-pool, while to haul out topiary that has been carefully clipped for generations requires a special brand of ruthlessness I do not possess.

### *Potatoes*

**I**n outlining my original plan I mentioned that the only cash crops scheduled to be sold off the farm were vegetables. The reason for this decision is that there is, and will always be, some sort of demand for home-grown vegetables. Our home-grown vegetables are comparatively cheap, therefore only luxury types pay to import. It is, consequently, not unreasonable to suppose that the British producer may hope for a price commensurate to the wage standard and cost of living prevalent in our Islands—in other words, vegetables should just pay. I say *should* for this has not always been the case; in the past they have frequently slumped.

The essential point about vegetable production is to grow them in as rich soil as possible, as they are—for the most part—greedy feeders, while production costs can be considerably decreased by growing heavy crops to the acre.

Under war conditions, the policy in the case of potatoes has been to encourage large acreages and to penalize the person wishing to grow a small acreage intensively; this has been effected by increasing the price of potatoes, not by £ per ton but by an acreage grant. My own view is that this policy is wrong—although it has favoured me personally; however, the demand for large-acreage vegetable growing is likely to decrease after the war when foreign supplies come in, and the position is more than likely to revert to the one prevalent before the war, when a potato grower was limited and penalized for increasing

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his acreage and he had to think of methods of growing larger crops to the acre.

When my final rotations get established I plan to grow on each farm ten acres of vegetables, rotating them so that they occur in the rotation once in fifteen years. The amount of disease in potatoes is becoming alarming and I believe rotating the crop too quickly to be one of the causes. For instance, I know of farmers who have rotated potatoes every third year and in the end they have had to chuck it. I am not, of course, speaking of new potatoes, which are lifted early in the season, before the many virus diseases are properly afloat, but of the main crops. I stress the vital importance of the long rotation not so much because of the consequent freedom from insect and other pests which relish a bite at potatoes—these can be got rid of on a much shorter rotation—but because of the great 'power' a species develops when planted on virgin soil; health and vigour are the only real weapons worth using against diseases.

I have elaborate text-books dealing with crop diseases and other carefully written treatises considering methods of cure, but to my mind curative methods for our field crops are not only a waste of time, they set up the wrong train of thought, and our only hope lies in creating such vitality in our plants that they will laugh at the deadly unfilterable virus and at other diseases; for these can have no power against an armour of vigour. It is, of course, praiseworthy to breed disease-resistant species but, unless these species can be given superlative health conditions, they will merely contract other ailments. I plan, therefore, in my vigour campaign, for a long rotation.

To some people the importance I lay on virgin-land farming will seem overdone, but it is, in reality, highly economic, for the virgin-land impetus to a crop may mean several additional tons per acre and this money is obtained, not through the sweat of one's hands, but through a few minutes spent on organization. These vegetable crops in my final plan would represent the only cash crop sold off the farms; consequently, they would have to be planned to yield the maximum.

For a number of reasons I am against artificial fertilizers in any form, especially for potatoes, although under war conditions I have to use them, otherwise the W.A.E.C. might say—with justification—that I was not earning my subsidy money but was cheating the country of the extra food she urgently requires. For the same reasons I am

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unable to practise my ideal rotation but am forced to crop fairly wildly; however, I intend, as soon as I can, to give up artificials for potato growing. I believe that forcing the crop unnaturally lays it open to disease; artificials also discourage the various X factors in the soil which the potato expects to find and co-operate with in its fight for life. I believe further, that if the cost of fertilizers is weighed against the decrease in yield caused by disease, they are actually unprofitable.

I plan to prepare for the vegetable crop in this way: first, to use a temporary ley field, which has been very heavily stocked for three years, to keep the stock out of it long enough to get a good growth of lush grass and clover, to dung this crop with as much as thirty tons of dung to the acre and plough it in as quickly as possible, at the same time subsoiling the field, to follow up the ploughing-in with repeated diskings until the soil becomes loose and allows the air to get in and help to rot the grass and dung. During the winter I intend to ridge the field in as large ridges as possible, subsoiling between the ridges, as this will allow the maximum of frost penetration and the maximum of drainage. In the spring I hope to flatten the ridges with a bulldozer and drill the potatoes in the opposite direction, then to compost in the drill and plant the sprouted potatoes on this compost, proceeding with the cultivation of the crop in the ordinary way. My small experiments convince me that this method will be very little more costly than the methods we use now, for the frost will have a chance to weather down the soil to a mellow seed-bed and cut out the sometimes heavy mechanical cultivations which it is often necessary to undertake to achieve this end. The disking of the ground in the autumn would germinate and kill off a large proportion of weed seeds and make cultivations during the growing period easier. They might even be discontinued considerably earlier by this means and so save the plants from blemishes which weaken them to the attacks of their enemies.

It will take many years to mature the whole potato plan; a great deal of work must be done before the rotations can be made to work round so as to fit in with it; but it will be worth waiting for and will, I believe, form the cream of farming on a system which we are not likely to improve—the combination of natural and mechanical forces to create a very high-grade product.

To make the plan perfect I have planned for the production of perfect 'seed' to sow in these long rotational fields; but the growing of this



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perfect stock seed is very idealistic and, at the moment, very far off. I have, however, seen so many of my apparently impossible dreams come true that I think I shall pull this one off also—even though it means buying an island.

One of the best ways of making one's dreams come true is to get a move on with them, so years ago before the war I was looking at islands with this ultimate end in view; I got as far as almost buying one, but the price was fairly steep and the island had catches.<sup>1</sup> To get it in a suitable condition to produce my perfect seed potatoes would have required a great deal of capital expenditure—money I needed for Megginch—even so, I would have had a plunge at it but my plan was still too far behind to make it worth while, for I was not then, and am not even now, ready for the perfect stock seed.

When will the day come?

I wonder! For there is little hope of getting my rotation working until the war is over, or rather, until restrictions have been removed and one can farm the way one wants; but there is, sometimes, the awful thought that one may never be able to farm that way again; we may always be controlled and always messed backwards and forwards without any fixed policy or any definite vision of the ultimate purpose, for it seems unlikely that the Board of Agriculture will ever form a definite opinion of exactly what crops they want, in what quantity, or how they should be produced.

I look, however, to a considerable slackness setting in in Government departments after the war, and it is on this slackness I count for the gradual development of my plan, so that it becomes an accomplished fact before the necessary machinery has been put in motion to prevent it!

<sup>1</sup>Since writing this, I have found the ideal island and taken it.

## POULTRY

### *Poultry*

**I**t is human nature to believe that the fashion of the moment, and one's own ideas, are constant things which will go on, fixed and purposeful, for ever; yet those ideas remain up-to-date for a relatively short period.

The Admiral, when tidying up the place, made a poultry-yard, an elaborate affair surrounded by a stone wall; there were massively built stone houses, designed to accommodate fowls, turkeys, guinea fowl, geese, ducks, maybe peacocks, in fact all the domestic feathered world. He was merely following the fashion of his time. A contemporary book on poultry keeping deals systematically with the 'keeping' of every known variety of bird—and even considers how best to eat them. This book is written by a man who has no doubts; he is sure everything he says is the truth—that his is the only possible way to keep fowls, and that the advice he gives will not, in a thousand years, be challenged by anyone.

It must be satisfying to write a text-book with that assurance. In point of fact, however, his notions have been proved wrong within a hundred years. *Disappointing!* I expect my text-book writers to be less dogmatic and to leave loopholes in their writing so that their books will still be readable after their fashions have changed or their ideas been refuted.

I have much more in common with the author of *British Husbandry*. It is a pity perhaps that the author's identity is so cunningly hidden. From the same source came a second treatise on agricultural matters published in 1844 and entitled *Farming for Ladies*. Although it was published many years after the construction of the Admiral's poultry-yard, it crystallizes the ideas upon which this structure must have been designed. The author points out, in a lengthy introduction, that 'this treatise is neither intended for the mere cottager nor for persons of large fortune'. Later on, however, this statement is qualified by the remark that 'a cottager or housewife might gather useful hints from its contents, while a duchess would lose nothing by its perusal'—as a blurb-writer the author was good. Several layouts of poultry-yards

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are given; these provide elaborate housing and yards for a number of different species. 'The Queen's Poultry Yard at Windsor', which forms the frontispiece, is only slightly more ornate than the Admiral's. A building, somewhat resembling an orangery, has a Swiss chalet erection of fretworked wood around the roof, while a tower rises from the centre of the building, with a balcony surrounded by a rustic fence, and the yard is enclosed by an eight-foot railing of massive wrought-iron. It would seem that if one tired of poultry one could change over to bears without altering the equipment!

My great-grandfather's yard had also a high surround fence of iron (now gone to scrap); but his layout was more 'in keeping with his station'.

Before leaving *Farming for Ladies*, I cannot resist mentioning a rather original idea postulated by the author, that domestic animals were never wild. There were, so to speak, two breeds. Thus along one side of a fence one might have wild horses, wild asses, and guinea fowl and, on the other side, domesticated horses, donkeys, and guinea fowl.

If one compares *Farming for Ladies* with an up-to-date poultry book one is surprised, not only by the changes in outlook but also by the recommendation of old ideas, such as the 'Poultry Yard' in new forms.

In my opinion the best book of the day is *Poultry Husbandry*, by Professor Jull of Maryland College. The last edition was, I think, published in 1928. This book deals with every angle of the poultry business in a very fair manner and is not dogmatic about methods. The interesting point of the comparison is that, whilst a hundred years ago there was only one scientific method of poultry-keeping recognized, to-day there are innumerable methods, all with devotees and, for one reason or another, some claim to plausibility.

My own view is that purely intensive all-the-year-round poultry-keeping is opposed to factors which are impossible to overcome successfully and at the same time economically. I believe the only method by which hens may be farmed profitably is as a side-line of farming proper, and for this purpose they must be housed inside during the winter and given free range during the summer; they must be liquidated after their second season. Breeding and the early rearing of the birds is for the expert and should not be entrusted to the ordinary farm staff.

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These ideas on hen culture are derived from observations made in my earliest youth and carried on throughout the years. From this knowledge I have arrived at a conclusion I am prepared to back up by going in for poultry farming on the two-thousand-bird scale, for I have weighed the problem feather by feather.

In order to make any form of livestock pay they must first be happy. Pigs who stand shivering, their tails down, won't pay in the long run. Hens who droop on one leg, penned on household ashes in a small space, won't really pull their weight year by year. I do not say that it is impossible to keep creatures in this way, for hens and pigs are deceptive—they will live in slum conditions, in all sorts of novel pens which the genius of human beings can devise for them—but to be profitable they must not just live, they must bloom as well—be in bursting health and spirits. I say this—not just from a love of animals but from the entries in my bank-book!

There is, for instance, a suitable temperature for pigs; if this fails the pig will have to use up the valuable food you hope he will fatten on to keep himself warm; on the other hand, if you make him too hot he will lose the weight you are feeding for so expensively.

Hens are more deceptive than pigs for they will suffer more and still keep alive. A hen likes dryness; she must at all times be dry. That is why I pin my faith on indoor poultry-keeping during the winter months. For this purpose I hope to use the lofts of my farms—I say *hope* for there is no prospect of increasing my flock until conditions become normal: it is not that I need so much additional imported feeding, but the Government—very wisely—wishes farmers to give cereals over to human consumption. There is no doubt that this is the best way to utilize cereals in wartime; there will, perhaps, after the war be a drive to stamp out malnutrition (what a word!) and improve our all-round human feeding conditions. For this end we must not only supply bulk but quality also. Whether we shall again be allowed to gather the world's food plums I know not, but I rather fancy the bulk of our grain will be imported from lands where conditions allow it to be grown cheaper, and, possibly, better, and that we shall concentrate on producing at home titbits of quality, full of vitamins. Amongst these would be the egg.

I hope to see the day when flocks of really healthy tuberculin-tested fowls supply the consumer with really fresh eggs, for what I have said

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of the hen and the pig holds good, I believe, for the egg. Eggs, we are told, can be kept under certain conditions for long periods of time with little deterioration; but is that really so? It is not intuition but common sense which tells me that the best egg for you and for me is the one laid by a really healthy bird *that morning*.

I know that to make a statement like this is very controversial, for according to the bulk of opinion eggs can be kept endlessly under suitably controlled conditions: but I believe our scientific knowledge is still 'third form'; we have not yet reached the stage of education when we can understand the finer workings of our feeding in relation to the body. An enzyme is still an enzyme, a vitamin can only be observed by its effect on a rat. In my view, an egg is as progressive in ripeness as an apple; it reaches its maximum feeding value the second it is laid and after that deteriorates gradually.

As you may have gathered, I aim only at the top. I want therefore to produce large brown eggs with rich yellow yolks from tuberculin-tested hens living under the best conditions we can arrange for them, and I want to sell those eggs (in half-dozen lots, stamped with the date of laying, and packed in attractive containers) to my customers as fresh as possible. I do not want to see my eggs taken away, collected, graded, zoned, and God knows what, so that in the end they are only fit for election ammunition.

April until October are the most propitious months in my district for hens to have free range; during the remainder of the year they are likely to develop trouble and are best kept indoors. For this purpose I have nursed the old grain lofts which formed part of each farm and are now—with the central granary—superseded. There will be abundant chaff for bedding; the lofts—being away from the ground—are dry, and ample sunlight (or rather, all the sunlight there is in winter Scotland) is admitted by a length of skylight in the roof. To keep the birds clean it should be simple to arrange dropping-boards, below the perches, which can be—in a labour-saving manner—shot through the floor daily into a barrow. To change the floor bedding, I propose making shoots at intervals along the loft, down which the chaff and droppings can be brushed into a cart standing below, while fresh chaff would be blown in from the threshing mill. I would use electric light and a time-switch to increase the working hours of the flock, as I have found this is a paying thing to do.

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I would 'cease' the hens after their second laying season at a time when the young pullets were ready to leave the mother farm and go out to the satellite farms of the estate.

The liquidated poultry I wish to manufacture into 'chicken soup stock' to be sold in jelly form. I believe there would be a genuine demand for this product and also for soup stock made from our surplus bull calves. The making of good soup stocks is agony to the modern housewife, for to make a good stock the pot must be kept simmering for several days, while it is important to the resulting soup that the ingredients should be only the best possible and prepared in the cleanest fashion. Delicious hot soup would, I imagine, be easily prepared from my bottled jellied stock, which would only need heating and dilution.

A hen which has done a couple of years' hard labour is never very toothsome when boiled for the table, but it makes the finest stock imaginable. Again, a hen bred for laying purposes is not usually a good table bird—in my experience a dual-purpose breed falls between two stools. I am convinced that to get good table birds it is necessary to have a game cross—penning up a fleshy type of bird with a very hard Old English Game cock. From this cross I believe the best table birds are produced—birds which have a tangible flavour and firm flesh.

I do not think, however, at the usual price paid for 'eating chickens' they are profitable to rear commercially—at least, I have not found them so. Rearing, feeding, labour, and other overheads run up considerably, so that by the time a bird has matured sufficiently to eat or to lay she represents a considerable investment and this is not regained by cashing her in at the normal price. To fatten up the surplus cockerels from a laying strain might, possibly, be more profitable, as they are only a by-product, but this method will never produce a first-quality table bird and, to me, there never seems to be any sense in trying to produce anything unless it will ultimately stand a chance of being first-class. Materials and skill are abundantly available to produce every product perfectly, and I hold that the consumer is entitled to buy the best of everything. If the consumer is unable to pay the necessary money to make first-class production profitable the fault lies in our hopeless financial system and should be rectified.

If one considers the amount of 'money' which can be spent, during a war, on destruction, one imagines the same amount should be available for construction.

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However, one must, in planning one's small individual world, fashion the plan to conditions which are likely to occur in the wider world outside and not to idealistic conditions which will probably never arise.

The Admiral's poultry-yard and the system of poultry cultivation, as outlined in *Farming for Ladies*, lasted a long time. My grandfather, as I have said, was an artist, and I think, fortunately, his ideas of art did not follow the prevailing fashion. It was not his aim to imitate the Albert Memorial as closely as possible in his buildings, though this was the ambition of the fashionable architects of the day. He was also short of funds, for he had spent considerable capital on drainage and reconstruction before the Napoleonic farming boom burst and rents dropped from as much as a fiver an acre to below a pound, although the cost of living remained the same. In fact, he was caught on one foot. The result of these considerations was that, when he added to the poultry-yard, the house he erected was in good taste and practical. I can't remember in my youth, when the place ran full out, if there was still a 'hen wife' permanently employed to look after the hens or not—I do not think so—my recollections were that the poultry-yard was a horrible mess and the birds always looked sickly. Later, in the 1914-18 war, with the collapse of the old system, the poultry-yard collapsed also, for nobody had time even to put the birds to bed at night (a feature of the old system); they stood about miserably in the bacteria-infested slime and at bedtime hopped on to the nearest wall. Later they flew high into the large holly trees, which had—in the Admiral's day—been a neatly kept hedge; eventually they forsook the poultry-yard and worked their way by easy stages to the back door; they made dust-baths in the border where there had once been flowers and carefully tended lavender—the war had left nothing but a few lavender bushes covered with cuckoo-spit. The hens located the kitchen at length; they waited until the door was left open and tried to slip in.

One of my very earliest attempts at reclamation was to kill off all the old hens—some of them were of great age and others were impossible to catch. One veteran Rhode Island Red flew as fast as a grouse and I had to shoot her.

The poultry-yard was associated in my mind with mess, disease, and decay, and I started the new flock in a somewhat simple manner by sticking up a movable wooden shed and letting the hens roam around

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it. I argued that the shed could be moved to fresh ground when the place got too foul, while the shed could be used for firewood when it became infectious. Under this simple plan the hens became less pathological while I contrived to keep them out of walking distance of the house.

This rough-and-ready system has continued through successive generations of poultry and houses until the present day; but I have, in addition, experimented with practically every manner in which hens may be kept and the results of this experience have been the framework on which I have built my final plan.

With regard to age, the older writers on 'poultrying' did not share my view. The author of *British Husbandry* considered hens of riper years—four or five—a good proposition, while Buffon imagined hens could be relied on for the occasional egg up to twenty years of age. At the present price of food and labour, I am inclined to believe that the maintenance of a stock of veteran layers would not be a big-profit enterprise.

Lest it should be thought that I sneer at the old-time writers, let me mention a point they all emphasize and which the modern writer is apt to gloss over. 'Know your hens', they said, and in three words they have told the story of why so many poultry farmers fail. Our modern ingenuity, love of labour-saving, and mass production has led us into a poultry world filled with every devisable form of gadget. We are seduced from the truth by automatic hoppers and time-switches, in the same way as the Victorians were led astray by poultry-yards and Swiss chalet pigeon-houses, but the unpleasant truth remains that the road to success in egg production is to leave one's card-indexes and charts and get to know one's hens personally.

It is for this reason more than any other that so much money will be lost after the war by our returned soldiers entering the Farming Mystery. For farming is not like any other business. Suppose you are a printer: Your offset litho press may cease to offset or litho, but only for a few sheets; you quickly turn it off and adjust the cylinder; but your hens may look as jolly and as friendly as a salesman of vacuum cleaners, yet they may be leading you into ruin. The maddening difference is that, while the manufacturers of your printing machine will quickly instruct you how to cure its ills and so master its habits, no one can explain to you how to know your hens—one has to acquire that know-



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ledge by the miserable expedient of *knowing* them, and knowing them—or any form of stock or plant—is in the nature of a special sense, like good hearing.

I remember looking at my brother-in-law's sheep with him and a very well-known professor of genetics—a man who has written several excellent and readable books on the subject. Jock was picking out sheep, here, there, and everywhere, explaining their breeding and the effect of various crosses; after a few minutes I could see that our friend, the professor, was all at sea. He had got into a hopeless muddle. Six or seven, to him identical, 'reverse-faced badger' lambs were muzzling round him, searching for crushed oats. Jock said:

'You see how the long face comes out in F.2; no, not that one, that is box-faced with a lean saddle.'

The professor smiled blankly so I remarked, comfortingly:

'It's all quite different when you have them labelled in little cages.'

'Quite,' he replied.

Geese are traditional to the district. The early settlers, I imagine, must have captured and tamed Grey Lags and found them economical. It is natural goose country and one of the last strongholds of the wild species. Most people in the Carse of Gowrie are authorities on goose shooting; I used to be mad keen but one day gave it up and have never shot at them again.

It happened this way; since a boy I had crawled down ditches, lain prone in hides or stood ice-cold in the tidal waters at gloaming. Occasionally my efforts were rewarded by a tough old gander. One day Tom Logie said, 'We're going to get geese.' He had marked carefully a field where the geese were taking, made a hide in a ditch, arranged for decoys. I think we would say nowadays that he had the whole thing 'laid on'. We arrived while it was still dark and got quietly into our hides, waited silently, refraining even from smoking. As the first pencils of light began to feel their way on the horizon, I heard the call of a small gaggle, saw them dropping down from the greyness right on to me, wings bent slightly back, necks strained out, untucking their feet preparatory to landing. They were right on me. Steadying myself I went, 'Poof! Poof!' and saw the leader and the second crumple, heard the thuds behind.

I had just time to slip in two more cartridges when the cry of



JOE STEWART



MORRIS



THE ORCHARD IN BLOSSOM



THE ORCHARD IN LEAF

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approaching geese came again; there they were—another party of half a dozen or so—skimming down on me. Bang! Bang! Thud! Thud! And so it went on. I had struck the goose day that perhaps only happens once in a lifetime.

But an amazing thing happened—this was the moment I had, presumably, been waiting for since childhood; the reward for the hours I had spent fruitlessly in ice-cold water, or lying frozen in a furrow—the supreme prize at last—and—I could not shoot any more!

A new gaggle came sailing in, dead easy shots—and I did not shoot. They landed close behind me. I could have turned and knocked three over with a single shot. Another dozen came sailing down from the now grey morning sky, slap over my head, and still I could not shoot. For some peculiar reason, which I am unable to explain, I never wished to shoot a wild goose again. I stood up. A flock of forty or so rose within easy shot—it was no good—something had happened!

No publisher would print what Tom said! We could have had perhaps fifty geese that morning. It was probably the only chance I shall ever have of such a record, but I could not do it. It was as if I had started to make a bag of children in Kensington Gardens!

Tom later told me a story about his father—a heavy smoker—who, before retiring one night filled his pipe ready to light on waking the next morning, but for some reason did not light it and never smoked again. I told him, in return, a story of my mother—from childhood an ardent fisherwoman. One day she was with a picnic party, by a lake, which included fishing. She was disappointed because other members of the party took the available boat and—after playing ducks and drakes with flat stones off the shore until her arm grew tired—took out her sketching things and started a water-colour of the view. She never fished again but always sketched! It was the same with our local geese—I watch them, like them, eat them when any friend gives us one, but I have no desire to shoot them myself.

We have always kept a flock of so-called tame geese; they make huge nests of feathers every year and hiss at anyone approaching; their yellow goslings grow visibly—like balloons—but the families dwindle rapidly. Mother walks too fast for them. Geese are devoted mothers—it is pathetic that they cannot realize their offspring are not born sprinters. The toughest goslings survive and are cared for anxiously by groups of fast-walking mothers and fathers who have lost their own

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families. For food they look after themselves, except in snow time or during cold spells, when we give them a little. We keep the flock at about the same level, killing off at Christmas-time; they roam the orchard and are, on the whole, biddable and fairly well behaved.

Geese undoubtedly have long lives, although I would not know how long. A pricked wild goose, found in a field, was placed in the old poultry-yard (before my day)—the poultry-yard was a sort of repository for any odd bird—this goose lived, apparently happily, amongst the other fowl for fifteen years. One spring, however, the Wild called her and she flew off with the local Grey Lags. The story, I know, would have been better if she had returned next year, but the moral is sufficient without further frills. The moral? Well, I suppose it is that there is no sense in keeping wild geese fifteen years in a poultry-yard. It is not profitable, nor do they respect you for doing so.

## *Part Five*

### Land Ahead

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#### *March the Fourteenth*

**T**his book would be incomplete without some sort of diary or at least some indication of how I spend my day, but it is somewhat difficult to give this as no two days are alike and each presents its own varied problems. However, I have decided to write down exactly what happened during one twenty-four hours, and the following is the result.

18th March. Went to bed at 11 p.m.; decided not to take anything to induce sleep.

14th March. 12.30 a.m. Feel very wideawake—splitting head. Count my fingers to find out whether 'pipe and read' or 'sleeping draught' indicated. 'Pipe and read' won. (I knew they would!)

A new book on philosophy. It seems more and more that philosophers are adopting the idea that everything we do is predetermined, because it has already been done. I do not believe this philosopher really thinks this about himself—he is just selling the idea! Good thought to sleep on! Lights out again.

'Supposing now,' I start once more, 'if this man's idea is right—I would have made all the same mistakes in the same way if I had had fifty new starts!' . . .

5.30 a.m. Try to remember my dream—quite pleasant—something about a man selling me an aluminium railway ticket.

'How did I get round to thinking that? No—I can't sleep for the moment.'

'Look out of the window.

'Been a sharp frost—thought there would—it will be too wet to put the Kingdom oats in, even if they come—they should be here—must ring up. I won't smoke this time—smoke too much—will read a

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chapter of the fishing book. He writes very well—wish I could write like that. The Americans have a higher standard of interest writing than we have; they never bore; maybe we only get the good books over here and the average is just as terrible as ours.

‘Gosh! My head!’

Stretch my legs—lovely and cool down there at the bottom of the bed.

7.30 a.m. Morning! March sunlight. A good night. Thank Heaven it's over. Curse the post—no letters until 9.30. Better hurry up a-bit, I'm late. Hot water, bath, sunlight through window. Life is really a good thing and my! I am lucky—almost a day for a new blade. No, keep that for a bad day! Sharpen up on tumbler.

‘Heavens! It's Violet's birthday. Buck up.’

I get scent from drawer. Violet is pleased with it; she is in riding clothes and seems to have been up for hours—Heather and April have picked some crocuses and daffodils for her.

Outside there is a clean sting in the air; it makes me want to run, and I do so.

The oats are here! I take a handful. Yes, they are quite up to the purchase sample. Duncan has the screens in and is putting the oats through the sifting machine; he has a ‘Wop’ bagging off on the Ceresan dressing machine. There is a loose belt; Duncan thinks ‘it'll hang out until dinner and I'll get it sorted’. Joe is getting on all right. Will I chase up the sand?

‘Yes, I chased it yesterday and will chase it again to-day.’

Young Dave says that his father is better this morning but had pains again last night—he's getting another bottle of medicine from the doctor. I wonder if it isn't the cut muscles after the operation—they would be very sore growing again. Do muscles grow? Yes, I suppose they must.

I see the postie at the back door.

‘Yes, it's very sharp but a good day.’

A lot of letters for the office, a good crop of forms!

Cherry and ‘Gogi’ have written. Cherry has been to opera with some of the other girls at her school; the tenor was not as fat as she thought tenors would be in opera. Gogi's Donald has been moved—they never seem to leave the man a second. Blitz very noisy.

Another letter: Miss Foyle agrees to points in contract; wants book

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re-edited. Yes, I think she's right—I believe we could cut some of the dialogue from different plays—there is too much.

Another letter: Man wants a house (what a hope he's got), do I remember him? Can't sort of fix him—will take that to the office.

Another: 'God! Shoes are expensive now—perhaps coupons are a good thing!'

'Who's this? Oh! I remember. Do I know the Canadian's address? Yes, I suppose it will be in the visitors' book—he seems to have made a hit during his short visit; perhaps I could do well as a matrimonial agent!'

Wave to Violet and Heather. Think:

'Something must be done about that kid's jodhpurs—they are out at both knees; they were Cherry's; it's rude to Wendy to ride her in rags.'

In the office. Corky not feeling well—splitting head—tell her she thinks too much! There is a heavy mail. Sheila says that Robertson's van has broken down. Trouble with compressor at Wardheads—yes, they have contacted the service man already. No word of the new corn-drill. Get Doc on telephone.

'But it was ordered last November.'

'Yes, but there are none coming into the country—if there are England gets them before Scotland.'

Tell Doe he has got all the answers anyway, even if they aren't true.

I shall have to ask Cargill to lend his driller and he won't like that—quite right—lending tools is a mistake, they are returned weeks afterwards—broken!

Corky can't get the acreage right for the returns on Inchconans—the trouble there is an unmeasured field, presumed to be thirty acres—must get it measured. Sheila says I said the same thing last year.

'And', I say, 'the year before, and each year I looked it up on the Ordnance Survey map and found it was not marked—will step it out.'

Corky says I said that last year as well.

We still have not got any further with the missing acres; Corky says we will put it down for wheat and then put 'Unmeasured' against it, and that they can come out and measure it themselves if they want to. This seems a solution.

Numerous other details crop up about the returns.

Then we deal with correspondence. I try dictating, hopefully. In the second letter I ask, 'Where was I?' Sheila reads back:



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'You said, "We can hardly wait longer for a settlement"'.

'Did I? It seems an inane thing to have said. Put down "The account is now very much overdue and a settlement would oblige"—no, don't say that; it sounds worse and a horrible cliché—say—"We are very much in need of the money so do try and see your way to let us have something"—that seems the most human thing to say and dead true.'

I know Sheila does not like it; it smacks of being unprofessional. However, there is a lot to be done so we leave it there.

When in the middle of working out the feeding allowances I heard a noise of galloping hoofs and see Heather on Wendy, going full tilt across the yard. Wendy has her neck out, ears back, and is heading for home; Heather is riding her like a jockey, sitting up off the saddle; she has lost her cap; they dash round the gateway at the bottom of the yard. Now the Kingdom road is covered six inches deep with loose stones and I think the mare is bound to come down on them, break her knees, maybe her leg), while Heather is going to have a really beautiful crash. I seize the box of belt-fasteners from the store as I go and race across the yard; round the corner I find the mare has had enough sense to take the verge and Heather is lying flat to avoid the overhanging branches. By the time I reach The Kingdom, Heather has dismounted and is watering Wendy as if nothing had happened.

'What's up, Heather?'

'Oh! Nothing!'

'But the mare got away with you—I saw her out of the office window—you could not hold her.'

'Well, J.D., I said I would ride her home and, you see, she went off before I was properly on, and I could not get my feet into the stirrups you see.'

Heather drawls and when she is excited she drawls worse and speaks slower.

'Anyway, she got away with you, you should stick to your pony, Wendy's far too big for you to hold.'

'Well, you see, J.D., she didn't really bolt, she wanted to go home.'

'All right, Ducks, let's forget it—walk her round the yard before you put her in.'

'Yes, J.D., but you see I've lost my hat—couldn't Mr. Bell . .

'You rode her, you walk her about until she's cooled down.'

'Oh, yes,' says Heather.

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While I am at The Kingdom I go on to see how old Smith is getting on, spreading the stones on the road we are trying to repair. Old Smith stands to attention and salutes; he always does; it is a relic of the days he spent in the Scots Greys, or as a policeman in South Africa, I am not sure which, or it may be a link-up with the Home Guard. He is filling in time waiting for the stones to come and is cutting the hedge; it has not been cut for three years and badly needs a shave; he wants a pair of shears instead of a billhook, and also wonders if he is to cut the other side—the other side is the march and on another farm. I tell him:

‘I’ll ring up Maurice Young and find out’, but when I get back to the yard Maurice is there in his car. He wants to buy cattle. I say:

‘They are very hard to buy these days,’ and Maurice says:

‘No, not so hard, but they are hard to pay for.’

We agree that we had better look them over and let him make an offer. He says:

‘Yes.’ We ‘had better cut the hedge’, but when he hears it is not George Ogstone (our professional hedger) but Old Smith, he says that his own men will be just as good and he’ll do it.

Maurice and I have been friends since I was fifteen. I was fishing one day on a hill reservoir; Maurice tenanted the farm and came over and had a crack—I know Maurice is the best buyer of stock in the district and so, if he wants to buy mine they must be good; and also he must know there is to be a sudden rise in market prices. We both know we know this but do not mention it; instead we have a crack about things in general. Sheila calls from the office and I go to the telephone. Mr. Brocket wants to borrow our American manure spreader for an exhibition of farm implements. I say it came in yesterday with a broken chain and needs a couple of links, but he says he will fix that! I ask him how the tractor he is mending for us is getting on; he says it’s like a ‘dog’s dinner’ or ‘metal soup’, which does not sound very encouraging, but he will do his best to have it done in two weeks.

‘Two weeks!’ I say. ‘I did not know there was so much time.’

Mr. Calder is in the outer office and he wants me to look at some hedgerow timber he is buying. I give up the idea of mending the belt in the granary, give Duncan the belt-fasteners and tell him to do it.

Mr. Calder says, ‘You had better drive my car, you are younger than I am.’

I don’t know if this is really a logical conclusion. We walk across the

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field to look at the 'sticks'. Mr. Calder takes a somewhat gloomy view of them; they will be filled with old fence nails and staples and smash every saw and are going to cost a lot of money to get out. However, we agree that I will get them out and he will give control price. When the matter is computed on the way back it does not seem—by the time they are got out—there is really going to be much money in it, if any.

'John,' Mr. Calder says, 'I remember your father, the Captain, fine'—so we talk about my father, the Captain—the tree subject is closed. He then says:

'I remember your mother, the Honourable, fine'—so we talk about my mother, the Honourable—and from my mother we go to modern people. He does not take a good view of the present generation.

'No one will work now,' he says, 'and they need a lot o' siller.'

It is now past twelve—the general eating hour. In the house we eat at one. So I get down to my typewriter, for this is the hour when I write, but to-day there is not much time for writing as I have a 'plan to draw'. However, I try to remember the events of the day and type them out—otherwise they will be forgotten. I have also to rewrite a portion of an article and by the time this is polished off April appears and squeaks:

'Mummie says you must come at once and not to let you type any more.' She stands over me until I go with her.

April is not yet five and is an interesting child to watch—she reminds me of a Japanese flower slowly expanding in water—every day she changes a little, learns something new, and her face develops more character.

There is a terrible scrimmage at lunch; it is also a meatless day; it takes ages before I can get in and help myself to the ravioli; on reaching my place I find Jeanette is on my right and April on my left. Jeanette is the wife of a man in the Fleet Air Arm<sup>1</sup>—they are staying with us while he is at the 'drome. Jeanette is twenty-two and very pretty—they are deeply in love—a refreshing couple! She tells me now how one ices a cake—it seems she has been through some sort of course on the subject and that there is more in icing a cake than I had supposed. April is a very slow eater and has to be hurried and so the cake story is interrupted at intervals.

About half-past one I feel dead to the world, sneak off to my room,

<sup>1</sup> He has since been killed.

## MARCH THE FOURTEENTH

shut the door, and lie on the floor; when I close my eyes everything goes round, I have a wretched feeling that, for some reason, I must not go to sleep, for if I do I will never wake again; I feel I am spinning slowly and am very uncomfortable. . . . I wake up, am still uncomfortable and very stiff; it is five minutes past two. I drink some water and feel all right again.

Outside I get my bike—one of those hybrids between a push- and a motor-bicycle, which I use for longer distances—but I don't get started as Corky wants me in the office, followed by Joe and a man wanting to sell patent cattle medicines. I polish them off and then run a long way with the bike, even so it won't start, so I clean the plug and then it romps off.

Cargill is sowing beans. I go into the field and feel the soil; it is just nice. Further on George and Scott are cutting the beech hedge; George does not want to lend his clippers to Smith; I shall have to get another pair, we seem short. George is right—clippers have a wonderful way of disappearing. The drainage is going well, there are five men on today. The head drainer has done as I said—put the top soil on one side and the subsoil on the other, so we can refill the trench without upsetting the soil ratio; we both spit on the water at the bottom of the trench and it flows off; we spit at intervals down the length of the drain—it seems running well. The tile trouble is, however, acute; they have no tiles at the brickworks until the next kiln is opened.

From the drainers I get to Alan Hynd. Alan has not had the grey horse out for three weeks but Jackie has mended the broken tractor, so that cancels things out. We agree to take the grey and put him in a set of light harrows to work the steam off after being so long in his box.

'Come and see this,' Alan says, and I feel something terrible has happened—but it is a new heifer calf.

From Alan to Morris and the pigs. We got a grand price for the last lot, sent in on Monday, and are therefore inclined to regard the pigs in a favourable light. Morris starts a long story about his son in the Air Force; I know it is not going to lead us anywhere, so cut in; it seems the son is quite well and that is the great thing; actually he is employed on the ground so there is no reason he should not be! I take a look round the buildings for rats, but Morris has got them well down and I don't see any sign of a run.

The day goes on. Hodge and I go over the cattle that Maurice

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Young is thinking of buying; the cattleman has done well with them considering the limited rations, and I tell him so.

We also have a look at the horse of Hamie's. This horse has had a swelling in the jaw and been off its feed; the swelling has been lanced and the horse is picking up now—we spend some time in going over him.

There is another new horse. I am sure now I have bought a pup. I purchased him with a warranty but the warranty seemed to expire at once—before we had time to try him. We can't make him go in any thing, I don't know whether he is green or has been badly treated by some former owner. A grand-looking horse, it seems a pity he is so useless; I think it best to cut our loss and put him into a sale, without a warranty, and take what we can get for him. However, in the end we decide to give him another trial before doing so.

Then we go out to see the potato dressing; there are a few points to decide in connection with repitting the ware (potatoes for eating). The Government buy these off us and then take delivery when they think fit. It is probably a good policy as far as security of foodstuffs is concerned but it is maddening from the point of view of a good-food faddist, for the potatoes remain in pits until they sprout; often after the bulk of new potatoes are being produced; we wonder now if there is any method of storage which would retard development, but cannot think of one. We have made rather a mess of the petrol allowance owing to the loan of a potato-dressing machine; for some reason we did not apply for an extra petrol allowance and the machine has used a great deal, so we are now very short. I run along with the bike and hop on when the engine is running smoothly, but only as far as the level crossing, which is shut, and the train too near to get over by the passenger gates. The surface men on the line and I often hold shouted conversations when we meet in this way. To-day we shout our views about the second front and the war in general; the train roars past, a soldier at a window waves and I wave back.

At Wardheads John is having trouble with the compressor—we spend some time messing about with it with only slight improvement, but I remember the compressor is still under guarantee so say he had better grin and bear it until the service man comes along.

There is a heifer calf to see, a very nice one, and twin bulls—lucky they are bulls as we don't keep twins.

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John has his stock very biddable, and it is a pleasure to see how clean the milking parlour is. Mrs. Gardner very worried about the compressor and feeding—we must get more feeding for the in-calf cows; we can at the moment only give them a month's higher protein ration before calving and think they should have two months (our pre-war rate). We go over the milk records—for the time of year they are not bad but we both think they should be better. John is going to be short of straw and he thinks we should buy some in. I agree and say, 'The more straw we buy the better, and the more dung we put on the farm the better'. We both agree because we both think the same about dung.

By the time I get back everybody has knocked off except Corky and Sheila, who are banging the typewriter and writing up books respectively. I write out the various things that have cropped up in the afternoon and which will have to be dealt with in the morning; we find alternative tile manufacturers for the tile hunt and manage to telephone and contact the agent for the Wardheads compressor; he is very nice and promises to get it right before the end of the week. Manage to get some straw and chase up the sand for Joe.

Quite a lot of other points have cropped up during the afternoon in the office which need attention, although Corky seems to have dealt with most of them off her own bat.

There is a question whether a man who has recently come to the place should get the bonus or wait for the second instalment at half-year. I am not sure what is fair; he seems to think he should get it, which is not unnatural, but Sheila considers he should only get a proportion for the month he has actually worked with us, which I am sure is right. I quote the parable of the labourer who sweated and toiled through the heat of the day and received the same wage rate as the man who signed on during the last half-hour; it seems unfair to all of us.

Cheques to sign. Corky has deducted percentage for newly paid ones; she does not miss anything.

Children's tea. I am late, but then I have been late all day. Someone has managed to make a wonderful austerity cake for Violet's birthday. Rodney, Jeanette's husband, is in for tea, and a very nice sailor friend.<sup>1</sup> We are to have a small party to celebrate Violet's birthday to-night; Moira and Richard are coming. Everyone is in great form at tea—

<sup>1</sup> He, too, has since been killed.

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April all over the new sailor! I ask Heather if she is stiff, and Heather says, 'You see, J.D. . . .' and then breaks off to wonder if she can come to the party. Violet does not see why she should not. I remember Cherry's letter and give it to Vi, which reminds her that Heather has to go up for some sort of entrance examination before going to school next term.

The children have a patent game I invented years ago and now wish I had not; it is called 'the counter game' and means you rush wildly all over the house. They get the Navy to start in on it in earnest. I sneak off and write out the events of the day to date.

Even if the publishers cut this chapter out I am glad I have written it because I have never kept a diary and it might be amusing years later to look back and see what one did at this period. When quite old I feel I shall tell terrible stories of hardships during this and the last war, when really all was quite routine. This day's diary will (or may) keep me straight—perhaps not, though, because—as one gets older and life becomes greyer—the past seems always filled with rainbow colours.

Telephone! A long-distance call from J., who wants to know where his old battalion is. I don't know, but feel it would be unwise, even if I did, to tell him on the telephone—never know what is secret and what is not—will find out and just put 'Town' in my letter—that surely will be in order. I can, however, tell him who is killed and wounded and that they did extremely well. We both wish we had been there.

Some way I feel suddenly rather small but then remember that the chaps of my age were all chucked out before the battalion went overseas.

Back to writing—finish to date—forgot to post article—go over, correct and make a few alterations—several sentences still rather blurred and sticky, straighten them out, and then on to plan. I think, 'I can ink the plan in now'—am just in the middle of a line when Heather pops in, dressed in a velvet and lace-edged frock. She looks pretty but I wish she could grow more. I am again late, it seems. No hot water for washing—coal is difficult to get. Scramble into another suit. Everybody in form, jabbering away nineteen to the dozen.

Richard has sown practically everything, but still has some ploughing to do. I have done ours—so maybe we are all square. I say it is too early to sow barley and Richard says:

'Sour grapes!'—which is, of course, true.

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Violet looks smart, wearing her fox cape; she has made a cocktail but won't say what is in it. I feel better after it. Think: 'Jeanette needs something round her shoulders to make her dress right, or her hair should be dressed lower, but she is pretty enough to get away with it'; think of saying something to this effect and then think, 'Better not!'

Little presents for Vi, arranged by the children on a table. Everyone wants to know where I got the scent. That's my secret! They suspect some terrible Black Market. I don't think Heather should wolf a cocktail like that!

Into dinner, complete with cock pheasant—a great spread—a school-boy's phrase comes back, 'Sock supper'; but it does not ring any bells with anybody.

After dinner I say, 'Birthday night—no clearing away until morning!' but Vi says: 'Nonsense!' and we clear away.

We get Heather to do her 'Imitations of Locals' and 'Mrs. Lewis of the Cavendish Hotel', whom she once saw at a wedding and gets to the life. Heather is then packed off to bed.

We play puff billiards—a game I have not seen for years—most of it seems to be lost—all blow in each others' faces—lots of laughter.

Later, ask Violet, as I undress, if she feels any older:

'Older than God!' she says.

Go to my room—switch out lights and look out of window. It is a lovely night. Sirius is magnificent. Everything is very still. There is enough moonlight to set the garden; the old yews are black as a retriever and rather the same shape—three great dogs watching over the centuries-old plot. I can see Venus through the branches of the lime. One should feel absolutely peaceful and at rest, but I don't. I know that night-flying will start at any moment.

Get into bed. Scribble down the rest of the day. Think, 'I will leave it just as it is without polishing or retouching. It might be interesting to somebody to read a day in another's life.'

Read Cherry's letter over again, she writes amusingly and says something very sweet at the end: 'You have all my love—all of it.'

Read over the day's diary. I don't seem to have done anything but talk to people, yet I describe myself as 'desperately busy'.

Feel awful. Count fingers. Sleeping draught wins—I knew it would. It takes a quarter of an hour to work. Night flying has begun, the endless droning, the roar of circuits, and bumps. I get that leaden, giddy



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feeling that a sleeping draught gives—hands cold outside the covers, feet blocks of agony—feel utterly miserable as usual. When will the war be over? Oh! must cheer up—it will be all right again in the morning. Must think of something nice—will stop writing and go back in memory to some nice, really nice, day in the past.

Hell!

The dope is beginning to work—maybe I shan't wake—this time.

## *Just Grousing*

**Y**ou would not receive a true impression of my character if I did not devote a chapter to grousing; besides, to me—like everyone else—an occasional good grouse is a safety-valve, but let me tell you that (although a fiery fighter) I fight clean, and bear no grudge against anyone; I respect the other person's point of view, but the attitude of the Agricultural Committee towards my efforts nearly killed me and when I say 'nearly killed me' that is exactly what I mean!

About a year ago they had worried me to such an extent that I was getting to the stage of being 'just silly' (or sillier than normal). I admit I am fair target—the largest farmer, by some way, in the district, and one who, instead of following the general farming practice, wanted to go on with my own plan, which strikes right across our local farming methods. They drove me silly but I probably drove them crazy!

My local representative is a very nice man, a farmer with a thorough knowledge of agriculture, based on years of practical experience. He took over an excellent farm, beautifully farmed, and farms it well. He has had a lifetime of experience (at his age he does not wish to be taught any more). He has also a good farm manager. He can consequently devote his time to improving the other farmers of the district, which he has endeavoured to do to the best of his ability and he has done this tiring and thankless task for the Agricultural Committee unpaid.

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Unfortunately he has made up his mind that certain farming practices are right and have a future, while I have made up my mind that these practices are wrong and have no future. For instance, he believes in artificial manure, fattening beef cattle, and growing cereal crops for the home market, whilst I believe the use of artificials to be harmful to the soil and that the last two practices will never be economic in this country as they can be done cheaper and better elsewhere. Again, he believes in subsidies to support these crops, whilst I think subsidies are wrong and that we must force ourselves to be economic without them. Again, we attack the ploughing-up campaign from different angles—he has shown a good example by ploughing up his old grass but on this old grassland he has grown wheat five years in succession. I believe he is wrong and that we must rotate our crops.

You will understand that on the principle of farming policy we disagree at all points. I think, therefore, it speaks well for my neighbour that he has not exterminated me long before this. Up to a certain point he has been patient but our diametrically opposite views on farming have worn me out.

There is quite a lot to do in running a bunch of farms during a war, quite a lot to think about and plan, and if one adds to this the difficulty of contending with Government officials, forms, restrictions, and—on top of everything—throws in my friend, for ever barking at me, it gets too much. The non-sleeping and headaches appear, the feel of the hunted animal; every time I see a car draw up at a field and a number of elderly gentlemen get out, with gumboots over their trousers, maps, and walking-sticks, I get a sinking feeling round the heart for I know I am up against the almost impossible.

We talk pleasantly enough of this or that, even crack a joke or two, but I know that in a day or so a letter will arrive from the Committee, with an Ordnance Survey number indicative of a field, and a demand that such-and-such a thing be done there at once; my friend has found a mistake or I have gone against the prescription of cropping laid down for me, and he has brought out the other elderly gentlemen of the Cultivation Committee to show them, for I believe it is his desire that the Committee shall eventually force me to give up my plan and put the estate back to the landlord-tenant system—the prevailing one in this district.

For a long time I felt I must lose the battle, but recently there has

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been a change in the weight of the scales; some of my farms are creeping ahead of others in the district, isolated members of the committee are beginning to think that this attack has gone on long enough, and I have friends in the opposing camp. I think now my plan may go forward, and then maybe the headaches will go and I shall sleep (in my little white cot) again!

You will know enough of my hereditary limpet nature to understand that I would not have given in without a fight—the battle to get my plan through has been a life's work and nothing will make me quit until it is done.

On reading over these last pages I feel that I may have been somewhat unfair to our committee, although what I have said is the truth in every respect; but I should have mentioned that our chairman is a very wonderful person and absolutely fair, while our pre-Bellona organizer, who I am glad to say is still with us, is a most likeable man and very good at his job; again, the secretary (who, of course, like the chairman and the organizer, has no power) is delightful.

In any case, I am not the sort of person who gets on with officials! I am naturally generous and sporting, while officials must obey the law and be very careful to do everything exactly so.

In this connection this story may amuse you:

I wanted to see a man about a machine at —, an agricultural machine I thought of introducing to the north. I had to undertake a fairly snappy visit to the south and this visit was dated up with all sorts of odds and ends, like dentists, publishers, film-people, seeing my mother in Hampshire, and so on. It was so fixed for time (I had to get back on a certain date) that I could not waste a second. Now to get to — and back in time for my next date meant catching a train at the God-forsaken hour of four-thirty in the morning. In order to make this train I booked a bathroom at the Station Hotel, where I could sleep somewhat and have a hot bath and shave before setting out. The night before I was with some theatrical people celebrating something at the Savoy until closing time! Every sort of transport was by that time off the menu—and you know what taxis are—so I walked across London to this hotel. I was somewhat jaded by the time I reached it and found quite a party going on in the entrance hall. A Canadian sailor—very much on leave—was standing beer to the night porter and his coterie and kindly asked me to join them; for an hour or so we discussed every



CHERRY AND TOMMY



HEATHER AT HER TIDIEST

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topic and told every joke imaginable. The man who had promised to call me was late and it was 4.15 a.m. when I got up; even so I should have caught the train but, not being familiar with the geography of the hotel, I mistook the second for the ground floor; I pounded round the corridors, completely lost, and arrived on the platform as the train was going out. The next train—the five something—found stations to stop at I had never heard of, which gave me an opportunity to doze a little (this is about all my sleeping amounts to nowadays, in any case). War trains being the way they are, of course I missed the connection at So-and-so, where I had to change for——. I think I must have met every garage proprietor in the place—they were all charming—and between us we made a relay-race with taxis (there is, I think, a fifteen-mile radius for taxis). This relay race got me three miles short of the furthest distance my manufacturing friend could get to from——. The question was how to wangle a permit for those three miles. I attacked the local Agricultural Committee and did very well with them—they were sweet to me; I got so good at my story as I went from department to department, I could rattle it off so convincingly it sounded plausible, even to me. My story was, of course, the truth, but it was put in the way a barrister might put the case for his client, omitting doubtful evidence. I deleted, for instance, all other business calls of my trip so that it would appear I had come straight from Scotland to go to——. I left out the Savoy and also the Canadian sailor and hall-porter party, which I thought might give a wrong impression, nor did I mention having lost my way in the hotel, because that did not sound so good. I just stuck to the fact that I had been called late. It took time as some of the offices were in a main building and others in a shed at the end of a garden; at length I worked my way up to the high priest of the entertainment—and there I got the bird! He did not like my story and asked for proofs. (I wonder nobody had thought of that before.) ‘Well,’ I thought, ‘that’s that. Of course I have no proofs.’ He suggested a card, but I have not got any cards. I put my hand in my pocket and brought out what I had; there was abundant evidence, my return ticket home, a letter from the firm fixing the appointment and details of trains, etc., even my hotel bill for the bath; but he would not give me the permit for those maddening three miles. Of course, he was dead right; in his post as an official that half-gallon of petrol might have been the decisive factor of the war, or got him the sack; he was right all the way. I was

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entirely in the wrong; but I had to tell you this somewhat lengthy, involved, and rather boring story so that you can understand that I am not the sort of person who will ever understand officials. I mean that if I had been in his place I would have risked the sack to help a stranger in a foreign land. As I said to him: 'It's a hundred to eight against you getting caught out!'

I got back on the telephone and my friend, the taxi-driver, said he would take the chance without a permit; but I would not let him. It was very kind of him, so I told him on the telephone:

'Blimey, you are a sport.'

He replied: 'These post-office blokes get you down, don't they?'

'You're telling me,' I said, but as I rang off I felt warmer in the knowledge that So-and-so and district is filled with good Samaritans, even though they do not wear black coats.

The years 'forty-one and 'forty-two were torture to me, from start to finish. It seemed that my plan was so irrevocably messed up I could never get it into line again. I loathed seeing fields filled with weeds and poor crops; harvesting and cultivating these scattered fields from a considerable distance was worse than death. The Agricultural Committee hung like a millstone round my neck; urged on from higher up they enticed me to plough up everything I had got—wholesale! I could not make them understand that I had a plan which would ultimately produce more for the country than the national 'crops at any price' campaign; that what we were doing was wasting seed and valuable man-power or that milk was really the nation's first-line commodity. In some ways those years got me beat.

One should not, of course, worry; any apprentice psychologist will tell you that worry comes from fear and frustration; Freud would have attributed it to sex; personally I have my own theories—worry, to my mind—comes from the mediocre brain having to think beyond its wavelength!

At first, when I could not sleep, I thought I was smoking too much or drinking too heavily, so I cut these down; later it occurred to me it was something else; later again, when the headaches came and I got scared of taking any more aspirin, and only dared to use a sleeping draught once a week, I began to see that I was sinking; I had got into a state when anything—even a piece of paper blowing across a road—worried me. I found I was being unreasonable and cross and, instead

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of saying amusing or intelligent things to people said things I hoped would hurt. I had to find something different to work at, alongside farming, or my friends would have to put me inside!

At the beginning of the war, when hanging about in the army, I had found the popular amusement for one's off-time was to drink. It seemed the thing to do; everybody said, 'What's yours?' In those days there was a fairly large selection of beverages so one could try out all sorts of concoctions one had never really got down to before. I would answer, 'Mine's a rye high', and later, when it came to my turn to say 'What's yours?' they could say, 'Gin and Italian', for there was plenty of Gin and Italian. It occurred to me, however, that while there was a lot to be said for that form of recreation, it did seem somewhat aimless, so I cast about for something tangible to do in off-duty time and—encouraged by a friend (since killed), who had been in the literary business before the war, I wrote a novel. The large number of type-written sheets came home with me when I returned to farm and for about a year lay in the house. Tidying up one day I found this great masterpiece and, thinking of no better purpose, threw it into the fire-place. My wife (imbued with a desire to salvage every vestige of paper) pulled it out and a friend staying with us at the time took a notion to read it and carried the typescript to bed with her. She persuaded me to send it to a publisher and, to my surprise, it was accepted and published. Later the Book Club issued it as one of their choices; thus two hundred and thirty thousand copies of this book filtered through the world, and it has been noted by friends in places as far distant as Baghdad and Iceland, while it formed part of the rather limited library of Malta during the worst bombing days. I am still amazed over the whole affair and I still think the proper place for this masterpiece would have been the fire!

When, therefore, I found the farms were getting me down so that I could not sleep and had constant headaches, I thought it would be a good plan to write, using non-farming evenings and the midday break for the purpose. Writing is a far less worrying pursuit than farming, provided one sticks to the simpler forms of books, but it seems characteristic of artists to attempt the thing they cannot do. A comedian wishes to play Hamlet, while a writer of fiction craves (and usually does if his publisher allows) to write some monumental treatise on world affairs. Mr. Wells could be taken as an example of this, from a



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writer of simple stories about such amusing subjects as visits to the moon he developed into the constructor of immensely involved historical works; in the same way Mr. Priestley has proceeded from a long book about concert-party artists to discourse on abstruse social problems.

Following the same tradition—although, as you will understand, in a far less distinguished manner—my writing led me from the novel and review sketches to a technical and ambitious book describing 'My Farming Plan' in relation to the country as a whole. Now this book required over one hundred and fifty reference books to check my facts and had to be written and rewritten so many times that I discovered long before it was finished that I had adopted, not a peaceful escape from farming, but a vocation which taxed my limited intelligence even more. When *Give Us This Day* (later called *Charter for the Soil*) was finished, I began to 'see things'. This is a remarkable phenomenon, if it has never occurred to you let me explain. When I shut my eyes I see faces peering at me, sometimes full close-ups, and sometimes full-length portraits wandering about in front of me. The first time (one night) I opened my eyes and, in the dark room, saw these spectres it gave me quite a start, but there it was, I could see unknown faces and figures wandering about the room—floating would be a more correct term. I have now grown accustomed to not sleeping and to these occasional visions. Going to sleep is no longer a pleasant sensation; it is like going under an anaesthetic, one feels 'I don't want to go off; I will never wake again'—then everything goes round, there is a dizziness, and one realizes one is asleep in the same way one realizes one is under an anaesthetic for the few seconds before becoming unconscious. Sleep comes over me quite suddenly at odd moments and I have been advised to let it come; sometimes in the middle of the afternoon I feel that I am going to pass out and quickly lie down on the nearest suitable spot; in a few seconds I'm off and wake again in half an hour, full of beans and headache! But the other advice, 'to take things easy', I have found to be wrong; by farming full out and writing full out I have no day or night to worry in; thus my worries have (more or less) ceased, and I have consequently more peace of mind.

The varying efficiency of the W.A.E.C. from county to county, with their different interpretations of the same policy, is intriguing. It makes one wonder whether climate does not still play a very much

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more important role in human affairs than is generally realized. The standardization of outlook and method by local climatic conditions and local prejudice does make it very hard for the individual pioneer, especially the agricultural pioneer, for he is up against a wall of conservatism very difficult to break through. In normal times this barrier to individual effort does not matter a great deal, for although neighbouring opinion may be contrary to the pioneer's methods, little can be done to stop him; but the power of the temporary war committees is sufficient to break up long-established plans or prevent the introduction of new methods. It must be remembered that when the committees were originally formed the most able farmers of the district were chosen to act on them, and these men were usually drawn from the class of farmer who had farmed good farms for a number of years on steady, routine methods, and had farmed them successfully. It was their job to stir up the bad farmer or force the reclamation of derelict land.

Now, the bad farmer is not always a bad farmer at heart; he may be bad because he has insufficient capital, because his farm is uneconomically situated, his fields awkwardly placed, or it may be his land is poor and difficult to make good. The prosperous farmers (comprising the majority of our committees) are inclined to view the small, or bad, farmer unsympathetically because they do not take the difficulties with which he has to contend into account. The average layman may think that farmers can easily be classified as good, bad, or indifferent, but this is not the case—farming is just as diverse in 'easy' and 'hard' money as urban business.

To clarify my meaning, let us take the cases of A and B.

A runs an aerated mineral company. Once his plant is in working order and his sales and advertising satisfactorily arranged, his job is fairly routine and fairly easy.

B runs a gramophone record business. He has thirty-eight elaborate and highly technical manufacturing problems to contend with, each capable of causing constant trouble and each requiring very great care; he also has the human element to contend with, dealing with artists engaged to record and an element of luck in finding winners; a difficult sales angle due to the changing taste of his customers, a variety of materials to purchase, and a highly skilled staff—difficult to replace and to maintain.

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Both these are luxury trades and might show the same profit in ratio to capital, both may be hit by changing fashion or slump, but A is on the better wicket—he has less worry than B, less work to do, and fewer trouble factors to contend with.

It is exactly the same with farmers. A may acquire a farm where the drainage and soil conditions are good, the farm buildings centrally placed and connected with the fields by good roads and within easy distance of a railway station or main road; the farm may also have been perfectly farmed before he took over. B, on the other hand, may be just as hard-working, just as intelligent, but he may have uneconomic conditions against him, making success much harder for him than for A. It may cost B twice as much for cartage, his land may have a much shorter working season, his buildings may be badly laid out, and so—even although at heart just as good a farmer as A—the conditions under which, through no fault of his own (beyond lack of capital), he works, may drive him gradually to ruin.

I have placed this argument before you for two reasons.

First, because I am particularly sorry for the B class of farmer. I do not think he has had a square deal—especially the small man—and I consider the committees should have been appointed by ballot from farmers and farm workers, not by the selection of the most prosperous men. As you will have gathered, I am not in the 'poor white' class of farmer, and therefore I have been able to give my small farmer friends a boost without boosting myself.

Secondly (and this does concern myself and, I believe, many other scattered farmers), the composition of the agricultural committees and the numerous parasitic control boards has hit the pioneer and the man with a plan; in some cases they have halted him altogether. The reason is self-evident. The farmer members are, for the most part, prosperous and have farms which were paying concerns before the war; with the present lavish subsidies these have paid up to the allowable maximum. The farmers are, therefore, quite satisfied in their minds that their methods are correct and that it would be silly to alter them; they believe that the Government and the country will have to support agriculture in the future, even though it is not economic. A man with a fur coat will not readily go into the snow without it—these farmers are ready to remain inside their fur coats and consider a man like myself crazy—because he wants to take his fur coat off.

## JUST GROUSING

For this reason I have not expected or received any support from my friends on our local committee; quite the reverse—they have nearly put a full-stop to my plan!

Now you must not think I resent this; it is all part of the game of life. I expect opposition and I welcome criticism, having lived long enough to realize that one's original ideas are useless unless struggled with and moulded by gained experience and the helpful criticism of others.

While opposition is the scourge which keeps men fit and driving on—I say sometimes, 'If there were no mountains there would be no goats, and a jolly good thing too!'—but I say that as a joke, for I know it is the wiry Highlanders and the tough Northerners who come down on the South and wipe out the softer races. If there were no tough breeding-grounds for these people the plainsman on his lush pastures would deteriorate to an idle, pot-bellied wreck. But I do resent the type of opposition one cannot fight against by legitimate means; the sort of legislation which brought the gangster into the States, or the type of needless, overlapping control, which (if persisted in) will eventually produce the gangster over here. This coddling legislation is a sure sign of weakness in our nation; the prevalent desire to let the State take care of the individual implies that millions of people have not the guts to take care of themselves. If the individuals of this country have reached the stage when they cannot run their own lives properly then it is high time they quit altogether.

State organization is part of a cycle of thinking which has been in circuit since man's ideas were first recorded. Nearly all philosophers have thought themselves round to believing that State control was the only possible method of running the world and then, having reached this conclusion, they have either found that it would not work or gone on thinking until they arrived at the solution: 'Individualism guided by a moral code.' Few people, I imagine, find time to read John Stuart Mill nowadays, although he was probably the best-educated Englishman who has ever lived in this country. His ceaseless endeavour was to find truth and he concerned himself with both State control and personal liberty. He started thinking fairly early in life (being able to read the Greek alphabet at the age of three!); after sixty years of hard study of social problems, the outcome of his thought amounted to this: 'Despotism, however well meaning, must cramp the liberties and development of a nation.'

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But—whatever one may feel about these subjects—there is also such a thing as tact, and I feel that if I lie low enough, water down my ideas, and do nothing blatantly offensive, the committee and the various control boards will eventually silently fade away.

### *Ourselves, Others, and Me*

**W**e must have been one of the last families brought up on *The Fairchild Family*, a series of Victorian episodes larded with morals. I have not encouraged my children to read this celebrated book, for some of my teachings are contrary to its precepts. Lady Lucy, for example, admired herself in the mirror when wearing a new party dress; a terrible punishment followed this act of vanity, for within a few hundred words of print, the party frock caught fire and Lady Lucy was burned to death. Her parents, appreciating the nature of her wickedness, arranged for her funeral after sunset!

I do not wish my children to run about in rags and they would seize on this story to cut washing or brushing their hair, exactly as we did when children.

We were taken to the seaside to recover from measles and my mother was left for a few glorious days in charge, glorious because she is not only a very charming lady but has no sense of time. One night the local clergyman and his wife came to dinner: before leaving he took a last look at the sea through the drawing-room window.

'Isn't it terrible to see those poor ragged children playing on the beach with no one to look after them?'

My mother agreed, looked again, and changed the subject, for *we* were the poor ragged children!

I quoted Lady Lucy frequently in those days, to account for unbrushed hair or dirty hands, until the story was banned.

There have been successions of children at Megginch, stretching back into the past, generations of children and their friends, generations of children and their games, some of which have been handed down from one batch to the next so that my children sometimes play



VIOLET



ME

## OURSELVES, OTHERS, AND ME

games which were old when I was young. For instance, an initiate must throw a stone when passing a certain tree—if you forget your opponent can insist that you go back when he pleases, and throw a stone. This is a most annoying game—one I fervently wish I had not passed on to my children.

There are a good many legends which delight children and are passed on, getting taller and taller with the passage of time. One legend tells of the existence of a secret passage from the old house—this thrilled me as a boy, but my father thought it rot, or that the passage had been filled in years before; however, some years ago I dug in the place where legend said the passage had been—and there it was! Unfortunately the sewage had been run through the end of it but forty yards or so still remain intact. We made two new entrances, and endless children—and even grown-ups—have wound their way down the passage.

Another legend declared that a number of one of 'Jean's' children had died of smallpox and been buried under the nursery floor. After the vindication of the secret passage story I imagined the remnant to be some truth in this legend as well and, if so, thought I would find a more suitable burial-ground. But, although below the floor we found quite a sizable room, there were no infants' coffins or signs pointing to the truth of this legend—the space had been designed for hiding valuables, or even persons, in times of trouble. Exploring these old hiding-places makes another first-class game for modern children.

On the whole, I should say we are a happy family; we have endless jokes and our fights are short-lived.

A few days ago, Cherry (my eldest daughter), told me of a fight I thought amusing. She had 'gone for' Heather (my second daughter) for bullying April (my youngest daughter); whereupon April went for Cherry for bullying Heather. This struck me as being typical of most fights!

I do not believe in moralizing to children or giving them endless advice, perhaps because I am not sure that my advice is very sound!

My children seem already to have planned their lives pretty clearly without my help; Cherry wants to be a writer; Heather to go on the stage, and April 'to do nothing, like Mummy and J.D.'. ('Out of the mouths of babes'!)

Talking of 'Mummy', I have not said much about Violet; although she comes into the whole saga, for a farmer's wife traditionally works



## LAND AHEAD

on the farm; I do not think it matters how large the farm is, or how grand the wife, sooner or later she gets drawn into the web, for farming on any scale is a family business! Cherry has to be driven to weed; Heather to ride with messages, and April to collect eggs! I believe the flooziest blonde, with the highest heels, married to the most super-farmer, would end up by feeding the chickens or weeding the garden—if she did not she would have to get a divorce, or go mental, for you cannot get away from a farm. Terrible things happen in the middle of the night—the larger or more farms you have the more terrible and more frequent these happenings are. Sometimes I think our telephone never stops ringing and there is a constant stream of accidents.

Years ago, when threshing at Oldwood, the buncher went wrong and one of 'the Adamson boys' tried to mend it with the machine running; the packing-needle (a steel rod with a head the size of an alligator harpoon) went right through his hand. Violet was on the spot and got him to the hospital in time to save most of it; so the traditional duties of ministering to the sick have not quite died out (you remember Lady Catherine and her excellent recipe against the plague!).

I cannot possibly keep track of all the cows—their pedigrees, and whether they have been tattooed or not. Miss McCorquodale and Sheila have not a second—thanks to Government forms, etc.—so Violet who (like her brother) is a good judge of stock, keeps chasing these things up. We know each other moderately well as we have been great friends for twenty-eight and married for sixteen years. Every 8th of February (until this year, when the catering, drink, and transport problems made it impossible) we have had a party; I always make the same speech:

'We have been married—so many—years and only had one fight,'—then I add, and this is supposed to be funny:

'Of course, there have been breaks in it, an armistice now and again.'

Somebody (I forget who) asked Violet how she had stuck me all these years and she replied:

'Because he has never bored me'—and *that* is the greatest compliment I have ever received.

That must be the essence of family life—not to be boring—I would add, too, that it is a mistake to take too much trouble about it! Most married people seem to lead a life of elaborate deception. We don't keep skeletons in our cupboards. I never say I was kept late at the

## OURSELVES, OTHERS, AND ME

office or, if I drink too much, claim the next day to have eaten something which has disagreed with me! There are no deceptions about Vi either—but then she behaves much better than I do!

There are many other details and anecdotes I could, or perhaps should, have related, but as I have said, I hate to bore anyone and have a horror also of being described in my old age as having been 'a great raconteur', for I have suffered from raconteurs in the past.

I believe I have written sufficient to paint the picture without being tedious. As I told you in the beginning, this is not the story of a very successful man, for I have not quite the necessary ability to be materially successful; but I have told you what I have achieved and you can imagine how much more a really first-class man would have achieved with the same flying start, although perhaps the 'out of one's control' circumstances would have been too much, even for a superman. I do, as you may appreciate, realize my limitations, realize that however hard I try to improve my intelligence, I may never acquire the ability to learn all I think it necessary to know, or to accomplish all the things I should accomplish, but that—to my mind—is one of the chief interests of this story. Libraries of autobiographies and family histories bristle with the feats of the really successful, while this is the tale of an only moderately successful struggle against a changing world. For that was the challenge I undertook—to try to alter an old family so as to meet a variety of new conditions not favourable to the survival of old families.

It seems I took on something distinctly original, for I have travelled in many countries and stayed with many people, but I have never seen anything like Megginch. It must seem, to a stranger, as if he had encountered a dinosaur when he had believed all the dinosaurs had been tidied away with the Palaeozoic period.

There are, of course, a great number of agricultural experimenters dotted about our country, and a goodly number of agricultural idealists. Leonard Elmhirst has, for instance, spent several fortunes at Dartington Hall and all this money has been spent for idealistic reasons. If, however, I understand Leonard correctly, his aim is to form a breeding-ground of new ideas, not necessarily agricultural; he has theatres, schools, and various arts and crafts mixed in with his farming. In any case, Leonard's show is much more cultured than mine, which is simply the effort to adapt a worn-out old family to a new world—the problem every species has had to face.

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There are also some wonderfully successful and idealistic farmers who have show-places. For example, Henry Thomson, who is probably the best farmer I have ever seen and a supreme idealist; at a time when agriculture was at its lowest ebb he bought a few thousand acres of bog and converted it into a magnificent farm; by doing so he brought a stream of prosperity into a long-impooverished neighbourhood.

Years later, during the present war, the Government—with unlimited resources—did the same thing in turning one of the last resorts of the bittern and the swallow-tail into a large farm; I think everybody in the country must have heard of it; but Henry had done the same thing years earlier, just for love of the soil, and never mentioned it to a soul.

Compared with these undertakings Megginch is only a flake in a snowstorm, but it has something one rarely sees nowadays—a business which is not just a business but a whole life; a family affair in a much wider sense than Pa, Ma, and the baby, for most of the people we have met in this history are part of the family, and so it has always been: William, who died—still footman—after a complete life in the fairy story; Mr. Stewart, nearly eighty years, butler; James Gardiner, who was brought up under these old men and has done twenty-seven years in the legend (now in the Army, and we write each other regularly); or Chrissie Cowie—twenty-eight years—who succeeded Martha, who had been housemaid for over forty years—and so on. These things do not happen any more. It is hard to say whether it is a good thing or not. James, for instance, was top of the village school and could have got a scholarship; he had the ability to work his way into the evening-clothes' type of salary, yet he has not done so. Has this fairy-story system ruined his life or have his years of devotion to a dream been worth while?

I can only answer that by saying this old system has a common tie which links us together, not for materialistic reasons (there has never been any money in it), but for something else, a bond between us all, a traditional bond which has gone on since the days when the feudal smallholders drove their cattle into the castle for safety against thieves, or spun together by rushlight in the long northern nights; the mutual bond has lived on until to-day.

It might be described as 'not scoring off each other'—a very simple recipe but one which seems to have given us happiness.

## SO I FOUND PEACE

I have tried to give you truthfully—and not, I hope, over-colourfully—the layout and execution of my plan, the family, and the various factors which combine to make Megginch an almost unique island in a changing world.

We have nearly reached the end of the road. Reformatations which took years to do at the beginning can now be accomplished in months; every day the estate takes on a new shape as the embryo matures. The excellent farm managers are improving the different farms, while the central organization with its loyal and able staff become increasingly efficient and the age-old spirit of the 'happy family' continues.

It seems now that I may finish the task I set myself—the task that seemed utterly impossible in the beginning. If I do I shall feel extremely happy, for few have the good fortune to be able to weave the threads with which they were endowed at birth into a complete fabric.

I think, possibly, the end of my plan will coincide with the end of the Megginch saga, for we are going into a new and, possibly, better world—a world in which the old individualists, like the Drummonds, may find no place. Moreover, it does not seem likely—even if one is tolerated as an individual—that death duties will allow the direct descent tradition to remain, for farming is just a living and it will not stand mortgages or sudden capital levies.

In any case, the male line of this small landowning family comes to an end with me, I have no son. The chain started by the first Crusader, Maurice, finishes with me, the last John.

Perhaps it is better so—nothing goes on for ever.

If I can manage to leave Megginch a perfect example of its kind I shall at least leave the field of our practically extinct class with a little dignity and some honour.

## *So I Found Peace*

**I**n the beginning I told you something of my philosophy—how I believe we inhabit this world with purpose—and now I want to give you more philosophy, partly because it rounds off the book and partly because I think it interesting to record my years of puzzled

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thought. I at least have found entertainment in reading the thoughts of others, especially when these views have been evolved, unaided, by an individual ego and are not the careful editing of a number of branded theories.

I have also enjoyed reading many curious ideas even if I have disagreed entirely with them, considered them childish or not in accordance with truth as I see it; yet, they are in some way refreshing, so I finish by humbly submitting to you the picture I have laboriously built up; you may compare it, if you fancy, with the picture of our existence you have made for yourselves.

When I was a child my nannie instructed me on religious matters; I accepted her teaching as the truth, partly because I was very fond of her and partly because many of the Bible stories seemed exciting and probable. All boys like the idea of knocking out a tank with a petrol-bottle—the modern version of socking Goliath with a stone! Later, however, when at school, I was compelled to go to church; during these many hours of enforced leisure I had time to sift the matter through, divide the Christian doctrine from the ‘eye for an eye’ teaching, while I formed opinions on the probability of the whole affair. With the harshness of youth and the pertness of a schoolboy mind I discovered the Gospels did not agree, while there were other serious defects; for instance, an elaborate genealogy of Joseph was drawn out, with the obvious intention of proving that he was a direct descendant of my stone-slinging friend, David; having established this fact, the good men continued to prove that Christ was not Joseph’s son at all, but the Son of God; in fact, for various domestic reasons, it was impossible for any relationship to exist.

‘Well,’ I said to myself, ‘that’s religion for you’, and straightway became a heathen!

I found, however, I needed something—some ideal of perfection—or life was impossible. I thought I should find it in beauty and art. Mentally, I made a triangle and arranged, in the base portion, all the beautiful things I could find, building them up in order of beauty, thinking that when I reached the apex I would find completely satisfying beauty or art; but neither in nature or writing or painting or music or in the spoken voice could I find anything perpetually satisfying, or anything sufficiently great to place at the top of my triangle—and so I wandered aimlessly, without a supreme ideal.

## SO I FOUND PEACE

Suddenly, however, it came to me that love was perfection and I made a new triangle, basing it with the love of woman, of children, of animals, of every living thing, but wherever I sought or however I tried, I could not find in love supreme perfection to cap my triangle. Tiring of my search, I went back and wandered, disillusioned, as before.

Then I thought, 'I have at last found it, perfection must be pure thought, it must be truth', so I studied and searched our philosophers, arranging them—as formerly—in a triangle, and I found much in some and little in others; in Plato I found much and in the Aristotle 'group' little, while in Kant I found nothing at all; but all of them seemed to miss truth; however close they got to truth it eluded them. Schopenhauer, I considered, had nearly found it, but then I perceived that, having travelled a long way up towards the point of my triangle, he wandered off and could not hold on to reach the top.

I became dissatisfied with philosophy and pure thought, finding it all broke down somewhere, and I was out again in no-man's-land, without purpose. I was even more unsatisfied for I could find no new triangle to reach perfection. For lack of other materials I started to arrange my triangles in different geometrical shapes; I arranged them in the form of a three-pointed star, but it meant nothing; then I put them together so that they formed a pyramid, and suddenly I became excited because I felt, intuitively, I was getting somewhere; the pyramid grew in my imagination until it mounted up off the earth; for some reason it reminded me of a three-sided slagheap, towering up from a black industrial country, where the wheels at the pitheads turned, and grimy, chalky-faced men were silhouetted against the intenseness of the blast furnace; around the base of my slagheap pyramid dirty thorns grew, with rags impaled on them, waving in the breeze, and old rusty salmon tins lying half-buried amongst their roots; it was a vivid picture I kept seeing without understanding it; then the thorns gave me a clue and I looked up and saw the pyramid grew cleaner as it rose, out of the industrial fog, higher and higher into the blue sky, up to the snow line where the sunlight sparkled on the white, and I realized Christ was the top of my pyramid and I saw it all, quite clearly.

It did not matter whether He was David's 25th grandchild or God's Son; it did not matter if an Egyptian 'penny-a-liner' had rushed the

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gospels out as a late extra for the Council of Nicaea; it did not matter if the black Saint Athanasius had crooned them to his stenographer; Paul, with his anti-sex complexes, making women cover their hair in church, did not matter; dear old John, having slightly home-made revelations about the downfall of Nero, did not matter—it was of no concern how the message had got through from outside the box our brains are confined in. It had got through, and in some manner, which was of no importance, had been translated into the kind of picture our pictorial brains could understand. It had been distorted a little but no more than a long telegram would be if taken off the telephone by a small boy. It was as easy to separate the truth as it is to separate sand from sugar, for sugar will dissolve out in water, leaving the quartz crystals clear on the bottom of the bowl.

It was the end of the first triangle, for He was supreme beauty and supreme art. He was also the point of the second triangle for Christ is love: and the point of the third, for He is pure thought.

At last I had got something I could bite on. I turned it about in my mind for a long time, trying to make sure if what I had found was truth, and I came to the belief it was truth: and then I wondered, 'Is it perfection?' and found I was not sure: so I asked myself, 'What is perfection?' and I perceived that we could not form any idea of perfection without the comparison of imperfection. I was still a little uneasy as to whether I had really got my perfect picture, so I went back a long way and looked at my pyramid from a distance and imagined that it was not flat-sided, as I had first supposed, but was built up in a series of steps, getting progressively smaller as they mounted to the summit, and I began to understand that when one was on a step, perfection and beauty were the edge of the next step higher, but when one reached that step one found perfection had turned to imperfection and beauty to homeliness and love to affection, but they all appeared to be obtainable on the step above one, and so I could go right up to the top of the pyramid, finding perfection leading to imperfection. It frightened me, for I found imperfection remained right up to the top, that Christ was not perfect, yet He was the top of my pyramid—so I studied the Testament carefully, reading it from this new angle, and I realized He knew Himself that He was not perfect; yet He was the 'tops', the greatest and purest thought we had ever had. He began where Plato finished, where Schopenhauer had wandered off; nothing had, in two

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thousand years, got within reach of Him. What did it mean? Of course it meant this:

Perfection on this earth was impossible!

I checked up all my evidence again, to make quite sure. Yes, it definitely did not matter whether He had ever existed or not, in the same way it does not matter that  $2 \text{ plus } 2 \text{ equal } 4$ , for they are both truth and He represented truth; then in this check-over I understood why His thought was so much ahead of anybody else's, for I realized He did not think as an individual!

Returning to my pyramid I had a good look at it and saw all the steps were crowded with people, while there were dense crowds amongst the black scrubby bushes and the old Del Monte pear tins at the bottom, crowds who did not see the pyramid at all and, looking up, I had a capital game recognizing people on the different steps. I could see right above me a whole group of scientists peering through a microscope at the edge of the step just above them, and it made me laugh, for there were ever so many more steps they could not see.

Above them, much higher, I saw Plato and Joad prowling around their step, trying to find their way up to the next, and I could see Bernard Shaw lying on his face, having a good laugh at the people below him.

As I laughed over my pyramid, I realized something else—why Christ—who was on the very top—could be so sympathetic with the people below, for from His vantage-point He would see all the steps they had to climb and realize that they could only see the little perfection of the step immediately above the one they were on and not the steps ahead of that one.

Still, I was not quite happy with my picture. I had taken years to build the pyramid, years of thought and chasing after moonbeams, and now I had found the truth that Christ was the top. Yet He was not perfect. As He was the end point of all my triangles it meant that perfection was not possible on this earth . . . and so the truth I had been seeking was horribly disappointing when I found it. I wondered if there was no other picture I could create which would give me peace and I realized I had been trying to make my picture too solid and too mechanical! A slagheap is rather a solid idea of Heaven, while a pyramid, in geometrical progressive steps, is somewhat mechanical for an ethereal idea.

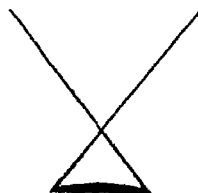


## LAND AHEAD

For some time no new picture came to me. Then I thought of the old-time lantern lecture—how the lecturer would bang his pointer on the floor and say, 'Next slide, please', and how the next slide invariably came in upside down!—the reason for this irritating mistake was that the operator of the lantern was often a hastily recruited youth who did not realize the slide must be put into the lantern carrier the wrong way up in order that the projection may appear the right way up on the screen.

I now adapted this truth to my picture of Idealism and turned my original pyramid into a cone of light emitted through a condenser from an unlimited supply. I thus had one cone of light standing on the top of the other, point to point, the first cone—my earthly cone—limited by the refractive index of the condenser glass, and the second cone—unlimited—but spreading limitlessly and endlessly into space.

But the pictures in the two cones were different, for mine was upside down while, after the cross-over point at the apex of my cone, the picture was the right way up. The earth cone that I lived in, and could understand, was imperfect, being upside down; but the higher one climbed my limited cone, the nearer to right-side-up-ness one became, until one reached the cross-over point at the top, when it was almost perfect; but after that point the picture reversed and became quite perfect, growing larger and larger limitlessly, eternally. But, of course, I could not understand the perfect picture, for I had always been accustomed to living in it the wrong way up; in the same way I could not understand its being eternal, for I had always lived in a cone of limited length. I found then I could scrap all my complicated pictures and represent it quite simply by making an ordinary X on a piece of paper, remembering that the upper V of the cross stretched upwards and outwards, endlessly.



Thus, after many decades of fruitless wandering, my earthly brain, which can only explain itself in diagrams, figures, and in pictures, found truth, and formed a picture I could understand, which gave me peace.

